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Theatre Practice



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Eleonora Duse.

Theatre Practice

By

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Preface

UP to the last two generations the theatre suffered heavily from the decline that set in before the Elizabethan epoch closed. With varying ups and downs the position of the theatre as a serious art declined, until in our grandfathers' day it held a very slight regard indeed. When the theatre, moreover, was taken seriously at all, it was as a form of literature rather than as a stage production. With this fact went another, and still goes. In Anglo-Saxon countries, and especially outside of great cities, the majority of people have opportunities for reading drama rather than seeing it played in a theatre, on a stage, before an audience, acted by actors. This condition, or rather these two conditions, have led to more familiarity with, and much more discussion of, that element in the theatre that consists of the play rather than with the other elements, such as décor, acting, directing, and so on, that go to make up the complete art of the theatre.

But the art of the theatre consists of no one part—not the play, not the acting, not the set-

things—but of all these. Each of these is a centre, an art complete in itself, as each organ of the human body—the lungs, the brain, the heart—is a centre complete in itself and yet related to the whole. All these together, as the organs of the body make it up, make up one artistic medium, the theatre.

This volume undertakes to consider not dramatists and plays alone but rather the arts of acting too, of theatrical design and production and such special phases and problems of these as illusion, stage movement, tempo, realistic and poetic methods, the voice, music, color and lights, and, furthermore, such artists, designers, producers, directors, and playwrights as illustrate and embody the principles considered. The very subjects undertaken, then, are not common to books on the drama and deal with points and problems that are often felt, but only vaguely shadowed, in the minds of students and lovers of the theatre and even of its creative artists. By such subjects the author at least intends to dilate the scope of the discussion and to illuminate a little further perhaps the essential nature of the art of the theatre.

There is another consideration, too, that these essays try at least to keep unfailingly in mind. It is this: the theatre, like every art, is a manifestation of life; when we talk of its attributes we talk of living attributes. We must, therefore, relate this art to life and read its significance from life, in the same way exactly that life may find itself expressed in this art and enriched by it. To attempt the interpretation of the nature and principles of any form of art is to carry on the interpretation of life.

To the *Theatre Arts Magazine* the Author is indebted for many of the illustrations and the permission to reprint, in a modified form, the essays "Character Acting" and "Wearing Costumes."

Contents

	PAGE
I. Acting	I
II. Notes on Acting	
<i>Movement in Acting</i>	39
<i>Speed</i>	42
<i>Tempo</i>	44
<i>Inclusiveness</i>	45
<i>Obvious and Inevitable</i>	48
III. Illusion and Wonder	
<i>Illusion in Acting</i>	53
<i>Minor Exhibitionists</i>	62
<i>Wonder in Acting</i>	69
IV. Character Acting	73
V. Wearing Costumes	95
VI. Seeing the Point	107
VII. The Art of Directing	
<i>Extreme Types</i>	127
<i>Music as a Base</i>	133

	PAGE
<i>Visual Music</i>	137
<i>The Director's Medium</i>	138
<i>Restatements of Plays</i>	141
<i>Use of the Actor</i>	147
 VIII. <i>Theatre Realities</i>	
<i>The Voice in the Theatre</i>	156
<i>Talent</i>	163
<i>The Tragic Goose-Step</i>	166
 IX. <i>Duse</i>	175
<i>Bibliography</i>	205
 <i>Index</i>	207

Illustrations

<i>Eleonora Duse</i>	<i>Frontispiece</i>
<i>The Dante model designed by Norman-Bel-Geddes for a production of "The Divine Comedy"</i>	20
<i>Another effect produced with the Dante model</i>	21
<i>On this magnificent model the variety of effects in form, color, movement, and dramatic mood are inexhaustible</i>	30
<i>The Dante model—the final scene in "The Paradiso"</i>	31
<i>Charlie Chaplin, Eddie Cantor, James Barton, Herbert Williams</i>	42
<i>Characters of the Commedia dell'Arte, Arlecino, Brighella</i>	43
<i>A mask from the Museum of Natural History, made by an artist of the American Indians</i>	46
<i>David Garrick, the great eighteenth-century actor</i>	47
<i>Toto's comic mask</i>	80
<i>Maria Ouspenskaya, the great character actress of the Moscow Art Theatre, and lately in English of "The Saint" and "The Jest"</i>	81
<i>The modern movement in costume design was heralded by Bakst's brilliant designs for the Russian Ballet</i>	96

	FACING PAGE
<i>Coquelin as Mascarille in Molière's "Les Précieuses Ridicules"</i>	97
<i>The remarkable German film, "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari"</i>	110
<i>Nahum Zemach at the Habimah in Moscow</i>	111
<i>The background for these figures in "Sooner or Later," at the Neighborhood Playhouse, is projected by the Color Organ</i>	124
<i>The use of light, its color, its forms, intensity, and revelation is in itself a language in the art of the theatre</i>	125
<i>Ben-Ami as the poet in Lenormand's "Failures," as produced by the Theatre Guild, 1923</i>	138
<i>Design by Robert Edmond Jones for "Hamlet," Scene 3, Act III</i>	139
<i>The banquet scene, design by Robert Edmond Jones for the Hopkins production of "Macbeth"</i>	144
<i>Design by Robert Edmond Jones for "The Saint"</i>	145
<i>Doris Keane in "Romance"</i>	164
<i>Giovanni Grasso, the great Sicilian actor</i>	165

Theatre Practice

I

ACTING

THE old and endless discussions as to whether acting is an art or not are useful in so far as they describe acting and make its principles more luminous. Every art is a form of translation by which one thing is expressed in terms of another, and, as Plato says, something then appears that was not there before. Acting is a business of translating into the terms of human beings certain matter taken either from life direct or from drama of thought and action that has been created out of life. The completeness of acting as art depends on the completeness of the translation it makes into its own terms.

If you wish to discuss acting as an art with any fundamental point, you have to reach into the air almost and pull down your own matter. On the subject in general little has been written. And the criticism of actors is usually not about acting at all, but a matter of mere impression and mutual personalities. And many even of the best and most inspired lovers of the theatre do not think of acting fundamentally. What

they look for in acting is a thrill. They look for the consummate and exciting pleasure that may come from some radiant being there on the stage. They mean by acting a kind of magnetism that stirs them coming from some luminous body. They mean personal distinction. They mean a human quality that is transcendent and that seems in itself creative. But the point is that this wonderful and radiant person is not a figure in the art of acting only. Such distinction counts more immediately in acting than in any other art, because the medium employed is the actor's presence. But such people are not confined to acting; they occur in every art. This supreme quality in this radiant individual is not the art of acting. It is a material for that art. In acting, the personal quality of the actor is a part of the material that the art works in, precisely as is a voice, or a hand, or a mind.

What such lovers of the theatre need to remember is that acting is first a craft. To forget that fact is to look for the thrill of towers or the magic of light on windows and to ignore construction and architecture. To talk of flashes of inspiration and thrills and devastat-

ing magnetism is not to discuss acting, but only certain heavenly by-products of the art. As in architecture or any other art, acting has an honest groundwork of essentials and certain hard fundamentals on which it stands. There is much in it that merely clears the way, supplies the vehicle for any fine quality that may come along. If he has no distinction of his own, a man may, in a sense, be an actor and not an artist at all. And a man of the most radiant distinction, if he lacks grounding in these essentials of acting, may be by temperament an artist but not yet an actor. These essentials of the art remain the same, from the humblest craftsman to the most magnificent figure in the theatre anywhere; and they are the basis of an art of acting. All sorts of methods and theories and dominant or superb personalities may arise, but the fundamentals of the art as an art do not change. All art, translating into its own terms and adding something that was not there before, is like the human body, which translates into itself a certain matter and adds vitality. An art of living, no matter how attractive, must first of all be founded on the nature of the body. An art of acting must be founded

on the nature of acting's fundamentals. These remain themselves; and, like the body again, are only dilated and perfected by the changes, physical and spiritual, that arise.

But acting shares with religion and literature the disadvantage of every one's expertness on the subject. When people are ill they send for a doctor; when they see paintings they consider professional judgments; and when their switchboards fail they call the electrician. But, exactly as he is confident of his religion and of what a good story must be, every one knows that he knows good acting when he sees it. And in the life of the theatre, acting is the closest of all things to the common man. Acting is what he looks at in the theatre always, even the poor acting that he often sees, rather than at anything else. However much visionaries and reformers in the theatre may have pushed the accent toward lighting and scenery, *décor*, music, and design, the common man stays by the actors. He knows that what makes the whole thing alive to him and makes it theatre is the presence of those men and women on the stage who bring the whole affair to life before his eyes. And so he concludes, then,

that he can see acting, just as he believes that he sees religion and literature, or as he believes that he sees the world about him, though he may not even see that the color of shadows in the morning differs from their color after noon. But whatever he may think, he is far from expert. Without practice or familiarity or study the average man knows no more about acting than he does about architecture or music. He may respond to acting in a manner very different from his response to music or architecture, but that proves nothing. You may as well say that his response to a caress proves that he knows biology. For acting, all the methods necessary for learning to read a language, for judging a literature are needed. One must have seen it often and intelligently, have endured boredom and ecstasy, have made comparisons through experience and repetition, have formed in one's mind ideals and models of what one thinks admirable. In spite of the seeming nearness and reality of acting to the average man, there is no reason to believe that he is any more a judge of it than he is of any other art.

This habit that the average man indulges of

being, where acting is concerned, so much at home in Zion leads him to conclude that actors must become each of the parts assumed. All the actors have to do, he thinks, is to take whatever characters fall to them and reproduce them as they are in life. He concludes that the purpose of acting is to reproduce reality so exactly that we might easily mistake one for the other. The highest compliment that most people can pay an actor takes this line. Chaliapin does not act Boris, they will say, Chaliapin *is* Boris. But what Boris they mean, or who Boris was, they do not say, or whether they have seen his likeness or read his journals.

The desire for illusion in acting is a childish weakness. One can understand it humanly; but after all it is too much like a monkey's delight in front of a mirror. Deception as an end in art brings us to nonsense. And from the confusion on this point acting suffers more than any other art; for this mania that people have, to find in art the illusion of the actual, pursues the actor to the last ditch. Many people who have got over thinking that the painting is art in which ears of corn are rendered so that under a strong light you cannot tell them from real

corn, and who know that the rumbling at the bottom and tweedling at the top of the piano to reproduce the thunder and the shepherd's bells is not music, know nothing of the sort when it comes to acting. They think that an actor's greatest triumph consists in making us think him some other person than himself. They prefer sometimes when he has died on the stage to have an actor remain out of sight and not return to bow before them with a smile on his face. People who insist on such deception and identity should frequent the dog and pony show. There they would see perfect naturalness, perfect illusion. Rover does not indeed act dog. He *is* dog. It is by just this exactly that such critics of acting show what mere babies they are so far as art goes. For they would substitute the make-believe of children for that more difficult and final business of acting, which is the translating of its matter into another kind of truth.

This perplexity over the matter of illusion in acting has led to widely diverse theories of its purpose. At one extreme we have what is called representational acting, at the other, presentational. The theory of representational act-

ing, stated extremely, implies that the actor creates as completely as he can the illusion of a life going on which is apart from the audience, but at which the audience is allowed to look on. The actor is not supposed to take the audience into consideration, but to live the life of the character he enacts quite as if the fourth wall of the room he occupies had never been removed. The theory of presentational acting implies that the actor takes to the audience what he has to act and shares the idea of it with them. In the resulting creation that he achieves the audience has a definite part. Grasso, for example, when he does a death scene would as soon present it on the floor of the foyer. What he aims at is the presentation of the idea of death and its struggle. He strives to free and convey it to us very much as it might be expressed in music. And music implies a listener. But, though these two theories and kinds of acting may vary so widely, the fact does not in the least unsettle the place in it that illusion occupies. It is obvious that, fourth wall or no, our understanding of a rôle depends on what the actor chooses to set forth in it, and our pleasure depends on our knowing

that it is art, not life, we are looking at. It is obvious that resemblance, make-up, impersonation become important according to the amount in them of choice, of design, of idea. When acting carries us out of ourselves it is not that we are deceived by what we see; we are swept by the power of the actor's idea; it is not so much some one's actually dying that we weep over; we weep over the agony of death. One often hears people say that the illusion in some scene was so perfect that they were carried entirely out of themselves. In a torture scene, for example, acted by Réjane, one might get so strong a sense of reality as to be made sick by it. But what makes us sick is not that we think some one is really being tortured, but rather that the sense of suffering and strain is made so powerful and so compelling that we are overcome by it. Réjane does not fool us so much as she dominates our state of mind. In sum it is obvious that if a thing is life, then it is not art. Acting is not art until it ceases to be life. It is not art until it takes what it portrays and recreates it in its own terms and adds to it something that was not there before.

The problem of acting is how to find in its

actual material the significant pattern or result. It has therefore, essentially the same problem as painting has or sculpture, but in some ways its problem is more difficult. The painter or the sculptor has to struggle with a different kind of immediacy in his material. The mere actuality need not get so much in his way. He may abandon more easily all reproduction of the actual object if he likes, and make a piece of pure design. But the actor has to deal with a more intractable reality in the shape of his own person and the other actors, and the problem of achieving a fine translation of this reality into his art is his last and profoundest issue. In setting to work he must not pretend to be what he is not. He is an actor. Like every artist in any art he must not deny his medium. The artist in stained-glass achieves his ends through the peculiarities of the lead lines and the colors. An architect handles a tower as first of all stone and height; he does not evade that fact but works in terms of it. To be pleased merely because a piano sounds like an orchestra and not like a piano is unsound and silly. To demand from an actor the illusion of reality is sillier still. The actor works in terms of acting.

And exactly as acting is not life but art, the actor is not some other person but always himself.

People may go on saying till doomsday that this disguise of himself, this reproduction of actual persons, is what they judge an actor by. But their experience and their preference in actors do not bear this out. Great actors remain themselves. Duse, Bernhardt, Chaliapin, Grasso, Nijinsky are always themselves under their various parts. And Charlie Chaplin, who never loses his identity for a moment, is the best known and final proof of this point. Chaliapin could have done what he did in Boris and have called it Belshazzar, and people would have said the same thing, that he did not act Belshazzar, he *was* Belshazzar. What actually happens is another matter. Chaliapin is not Boris; he is himself. And if he were Boris, it would only mean that we should have to find another Chaliapin to act this Boris Chaliapin before we should have art; before we should, in Coquelin's words, have added to nature that lustre and relief that would make it art. It is commonly heard that an artist like Guitry, or Novelli, is different in every part,

and in every part is the very man portrayed. But the truth is that these actors are always themselves. It is only by an effort that they are able to become even in terms of themselves another character. In acting, as in sculpture or any other art, the medium resists the idea. What we get as a delineation is the result of the struggle of the actor's self with the self he tries to force upon it. It is the power of these great actors' conception and their ability to create this conception in terms of themselves that convinces us of the exactitude of each part. These actors in themselves supply a sort of continuity of radiance that shines through and illuminates and makes visible the quality of the characters they assume.

Actors remain artists, therefore, in proportion to the extent to which they remain themselves and translate into the terms of themselves the thing to be created. They are firmly fixed at the centre. They remain themselves, even though it may not be their immediate selves. And so it follows that their art depends wholly on what these selves of theirs profoundly are. The greatness of a man's acting will depend on the extent to which the elements of life may be

gathered up in him for the spring toward luminous revelation, toward more abundant life. Art is a perpetual growth of life in other terms than itself. And the individual quality of the actor must always determine the quality of the terms in which his particular art expresses life. That the sensibility and intelligence—to use the old terms—of an actor, his gift, his soul, his music, his miracle of talent, are what measures his achievement, is indisputable. And though these may be partly born and partly acquired, they can never be overlooked or taken for granted. If you amount to nothing, your art in the end amounts to nothing; that is a fact almost biological in its brutal certainty. The actor's business is to remain himself forever; but to cause to grow in himself such flexibility and fluidity and eloquent magnetism of body, and such sympathy of the imagination, as may be translated into compelling presentations of human character and living. Only through this translation of the character into himself can an actor profess to be an artist at all and the "lord of another's soul."

But no matter how great this self of the actor's may be, he cannot express it until he

develops an adequate technic. Too many people on the stage have an easy belief that almost any one can act if he feels the emotion of the part in him and the will to do it. This is the volition theory, strong among earnest thinkers, Puritans and others, who have little knowledge of art, and like, in general, to believe that what you desire deeply enough you can achieve without the physical necessity of having a mind or skill. But will alone has obviously nothing in it but will. The will theory makes nonsense when you come to art, and drools all intelligence and point away into sleepy doxologies. Nature was never art; and merely feeling the rôle will never enable the actor to act, however delightful and democratic a state of affairs that might imply. An actor who has not found for himself technical machinery, one way or another, is like a man without a tongue; he may make all manner of sounds but never mean for other men what he has within him to say.

For how, without technic, shall the actor know a way to discover out of many possible devices and symbols those suited to his own physical case and at the same time intelligible to men in general? How, without technic, shall he be

sure of his voice, the most moving part of him? How shall he know to regulate the tone, to darken or whiten it; how know the retardation and acceleration of rhythm; the actual speed in relation to the effect of speed that is produced; the resistant flexibility, as Lewes called it, that is the soul of elocution? How, if he has not studied music or is at least musical by nature, shall the actor maintain a rhythm, not only in his speech but in his movements; how shall he give to the very lines of his presence on the stage a flow and unity, a continuous design? How shall he know the difference between poverty and economy in his art; how find in his material the elements at once real and essential? Some effect an actor may get by inspiration, if you like; by rising to some emotion that possesses him. But how, without technic, can he reduce what may be finely inspired but is incoherent to permanent and reliable comprehensibility. How can he fertilize his mind as the field for inspiration? How, without technic, shall he have the means to accomplish what is the final test of acting, that sound gradation of expression throughout a whole piece? How shall he, in sum, be able

to last through an entire part, and maintain a hardness of fibre that will not give out before the end is reached and the whole pattern exhibited? And even with all these, how can the actor be sure of his ability to repeat this achievement, as he must do, night after night? Without technic and practice, alas, these problems of his art will not only remain unmastered but will not even trouble him as necessary, if indeed they occur to him at all.

The actor, taking up a part, must have first of all an idea.

Before he can do anything with a part the actor, besides his feeling and his will to express it, and in addition also to his technical equipment, must have some idea in his mind, as Garrick told Diderot; some Homeric phantom, as Diderot put it, to which his mind can rise and with which he can identify himself. He can never play from nature direct, but from some idea—set up out of nature, if you like—in his mind. The actor plays from some imaginary being who is not his own self nor yet any self in nature. Homer, deserving to be praised for many other things, Aristotle says, is most to be praised because he knows what part to

take himself. It is through his idea that the actor gets the rôle at the right distance from and in the right relation to himself to make it art.

A part of this conception and right relationship consists in an ability to perceive the quality of the thing acted, to perceive its school, its genre, its characteristic necessity; the ability to act it, in sum, in its own kind. The acting for Sheridan is as different from the acting for *The First Year* as the drawings in the *Saturday Evening Post* are from Sir Peter Lely, or as Beau Brummel's red heels from a pair of sport shoes, or a sedan chair from a hammock. The acting for Racine has nothing in common technically with the acting of Shakespeare. The characteristic quality must be translated into the acting or the whole performance will be pretty much rubbish. Without technic and culture the liveliest feeling and warmest enthusiasm in the world cannot discern or express those various qualities in drama, each with technical elements that are its own.

In the absence of skill among actors the softest way for the producer, the ordinary playwright and the audience is often to put actors

in parts for which they are fitted congenitally, photographically; to find a blue-eyed boy for the blue-eyed rôle, sweets for the sweet, and fat to the fat. But this spoils acting as an art. It crosscuts to the merely expedient. The mere superficiality of likeness in an actor to a character will often satisfy and so evade the need of creating a piece of art. And through this he is led to omit the necessary exercise in creation and the constant practice in technic that can make him an artist. There have, obviously, been great actors who have been capable of only one kind of rôle, of one line; but it has always been at their peril as artists. It has never, moreover, been on a merely expedient and actualistic basis. These actors are always somewhat more than the line they take, the part they play; and they are not primarily related to it by their waist-line, their age, youth, or the length of their noses. For the artist on the stage, as Aristotle says of the poet, is not an imitator (*mimetes*), does not create an image, when he speaks himself.

The exercise of the imagination, the airing of our dreams, is one of the great pleasures of the theatre. If actors have no technic and no

imagination, half our life in the theatre is left fallow in us; the poetic sides of the theatre remain unembodied. The keen use of the mind, the notes taken, the glancing recognitions of aptness in the actor's detail, is one of our delights. If actors have no acuteness, the prose portions of the theatre go stale and mediocre.

There is about the great acting of great moments in drama something that at once arouses and satisfies the imagination. It is a kind of inevitable revelation, a wide excitement that is due to the poignant identity of all the things involved. The recognition on our part of the relation between what is done and what is expressed is so luminous, so happy, so easy and complete, that it takes on the quality of inspiration. In *Mala Gloria*, for an illustration, the hero comes home from prison and a bandit's life to find that his wife has betrayed him for the young son of the house where she is employed as a maid. He kills her and departs again. What Grasso did when he acted the rôle was to kill the woman and then, instead of going straight out of the room, to turn on the young man, to turn madly, pause, catch his hand on the boy's head, kiss his brow sud-

denly, and spin him blindly from him; as you might treat a child who without knowing it has ruined your life. That was great imaginative acting; it left us with a sense of the entire content of the moment; it spread through infinite reaches of human significance.

But on a more familiar and less intense plane there is the satisfaction of sheer wit in the theatre. It is a quality less luminous than the finely imaginative; but it has, nevertheless, its own clarity and sharp eyes, it has aptness and that swift perception of neat similarities that we define as wit. Intense moments in the theatre, as in life, may without any comment supply their own imaginative depths. But the ordinary moments in drama are full of the ordinary elements of the familiar day. The pleasure we get from them comes from the liveliness with which we are able to perceive their contrasts and similarities and sharp, incongruous details. So that in this region of the familiar, if there is little technic and understanding on the actor's part, our loss is great, since at every moment the need appears for the sly philosophy and wit of the actor's own approach to his material. A great artist like Ma-



On this magnificent model the variety of effects in form, color, movement, and dramatic mood are inexhaustible



The Dante Model—final scene in the Paradiso.

dame Yvette Guilbert—though she can have superb poetry at times—is, when she is at her prose best, a theatre of sheer mental exhilaration. Her perception and expression of the moment make an infectious riot in the mind and furnish a perpetual sense of quick cerebration, of epigram, of gay precision. The manner in which Miss Estelle Winwood's Madame Pierre in the heat of her lover's adoration ran off to see after her little sick dog, delighted the mind largely because Miss Winwood could put into what she was as Madame Pierre and what she did as Madame Pierre, a witty perception of relationship and similarity; Miss Winwood, in short, was technically able to inject into the moment her own witty comment upon it. All impersonation—though it is a low form of acting as a rule—depends for its success on its wit, which appears through the correspondence that we perceive between the acute observation of its subject-matter and the technic that conveys it. Apart from the greatest moments of drama and acting, this effect of wit and mental agility may be one of the theatre's greatest satisfactions. Acting may delight inexhaustibly by showing us how charming, how sane, how ex-

citing, how satisfying sheer observation and economy may be.

If we have not expertness and distinction among actors, audiences will no longer know what good acting is, except for the few simple human qualities so close to our natures that they act themselves. And audiences will have no way of learning what the nature of acting is; for, as with all arts, the only way to understand acting is by seeing it and being thrown with it. And where there is little art in acting, people come to look for what is called, for want of a better name, personality; they vaunt individuals, shout for one family of actors, follow one lady till her charms decline and then follow another. And the great distraction of the actor, his extreme craving for popularity—certainly natural enough in his case—becomes more and more purely personal, and on that account more precarious and often foolish. For, though the personal and individual appeal of an actor is basic so far as his art is concerned, the stressing of that appeal as mere personality is harmful for him as an artist and silly and stultifying for his admirers. All good actors are, through their technic and their distinction, comments

on themselves and through themselves on the rôles they create. They speak as critics of life. When audiences forget to demand that comment and are willing to put up with the mere individual, acting sinks to journalism, to personal gossip, to a chatter of public privacies.

And worst of all, without capable actors dramatists forget what to write for. As artists, playwrights create in terms not of nature but of their art; and when the actors they see are unable to suggest anything but the mediocre or the merely accidental or incidental or personally good, these playwrights lose much of their inspiration. Not the ideal dramatist perhaps; his content may press to its own creation. But it is hard to picture even your great man as deeply urged to write for nincompoops who have no craft or range, or for talents that are wholly undeveloped and in a state of hit and miss. But for the lesser playwright the decline in his art may very well accompany the decline in the medium for its expression, the actor; and so we have a vicious circle, since the dramatists themselves have no little share in the state of acting that obtains.

It may be said of American acting at present that there is no way to tell just how much talent there is because of the lack of training by which that talent might be developed and exhibited. There are instances every season of beautiful acting, but there is no actor whose art may be said to be complete or transcendent. One thing our actors do well, the kind of thing that the English call very American. It is a certain effect of lively good nature, jazz, common sense, and healthy spirits. Mr. George M. Cohan will serve as an example; he has undoubted talent and a great knowledge in the means by which his ends are wrought. But this is a thin region after all, boyishly abundant on the prose side and covering a wide, but not very deep, section of our popular life. One would hate to think that such an art might represent what America most is. We have mostly crowds of actors who never take the trouble to learn their business. The details of acting as a craft they pass by; they merely go on the stage. The unfortunate stage happens to be the direction in which egotism or opportunity leads them. They stand or fall by their own natural lustre. So far as one can tell, they do on the stage just

what they would do off it; and we are supposed, perhaps, to think that merely seeing them there is delightful. But they have no technic either of manner, voice, diction, gesture, or of conception and projection in acting terms. It is often better to read the play than to see such actors stultify whatever life is in it. But acting with us is forwarded by the same methods as those on which razors and washing-powders rise to fame and automobiles become great. And a public without social cleavages or well-defined cultural criterions or authorities, follows whatever happens to be pushed to the front. On the Continent there are scores of persons who are favorites but are never mistaken for anything save what they are, mere amusers and popular pets. With us such persons are not only liked, they are acclaimed as celebrated artists. And American audiences in their turn have little to go by if they want to learn to understand acting by seeing good examples of it. Those who have not seen a dragon have at least seen a great pine-cone, Pausanias said, trying to describe the scale corselets of certain warriors. In our theatre we have few pine-cones even to study the patterns of acting from.

For we lack the lesser type of actors, so common in Italy and France and Germany, in whom we get technic, and sound technic at that, without eminence. On the contrary, if we have anything in America, it is more apt to be the dragons, actors whom the vagaries of talent alone have made significant. And this is unfortunate. Such actors have nothing but their own personal *flair* to shine with. Any technical lessons that smaller or younger actors could learn from them are worse than nothing; their imitators end by copying faults. And that only sets us back; for it is better for acting in general that we have bad imitations of good art than the imitations of bad art that often succeed in New York.

An Englishman who wishes to become an actor starts off with handicaps in the very medium of the art, in the means by which acting exists at all. He has an inexpressive body to begin with. He instinctively mistrusts the direct and free expression of emotion, and thus he unconsciously shrinks the channels by which his inner life is released and the visible means by which it is conveyed to others. He lives in the midst of a society whose essential quality

passes more easily into arts like literature and religion than into the art of the theatre. English acting has had great days no doubt and a lustre of shining names; but not now. English actors, when they do speak well, which is not always, speak better than ours do, though they have no standard of speech such as the French possess. They evince in their stage manner more security and poise than American actors do, and sometimes a certain kind of taste and restraint that is admirable. They enjoy a more solidly distributed method, a better gradation, than we do. And in social comedy they have a humerous and rich tradition, they have a droll analysis and intelligent irony where our actors are apt to have only vivacity, sentiment, and the sense of a joke. But in tragedy they lack flexibility in voice, gesture, and emotional current. And they have a way of substituting for passion and force and spiritual elegance a certain sweetish piety peculiarly their own and peculiarly false. And English actors—Forbes-Robertson in *Hamlet*, for instance—have a way when they deal with a great classic of behaving as if it were the Bible; they display upon what they regard as classic a mistaken

reverence and a sacred mannerism that throws the whole work out of joint. And, what is one of the most distressing limitations of all, both English and American actors suffer from that Anglo-Saxon trait so much indulged in the last century, the hatred of the premeditated in art. Because of this predilection their acting gets into all sorts of foolish positions. Mentality, calculation, and arrangement are afraid of showing their heads. The idea of art as itself and as built up of its own designs is antagonistic to an Anglo-Saxon, who—though he knows in his heart that it is all bosh and that life and art both prove to the contrary—likes the effect of artlessness in art and of what he calls sincerity, exactly as he likes that effect in women, in politics, in manners, and in war.

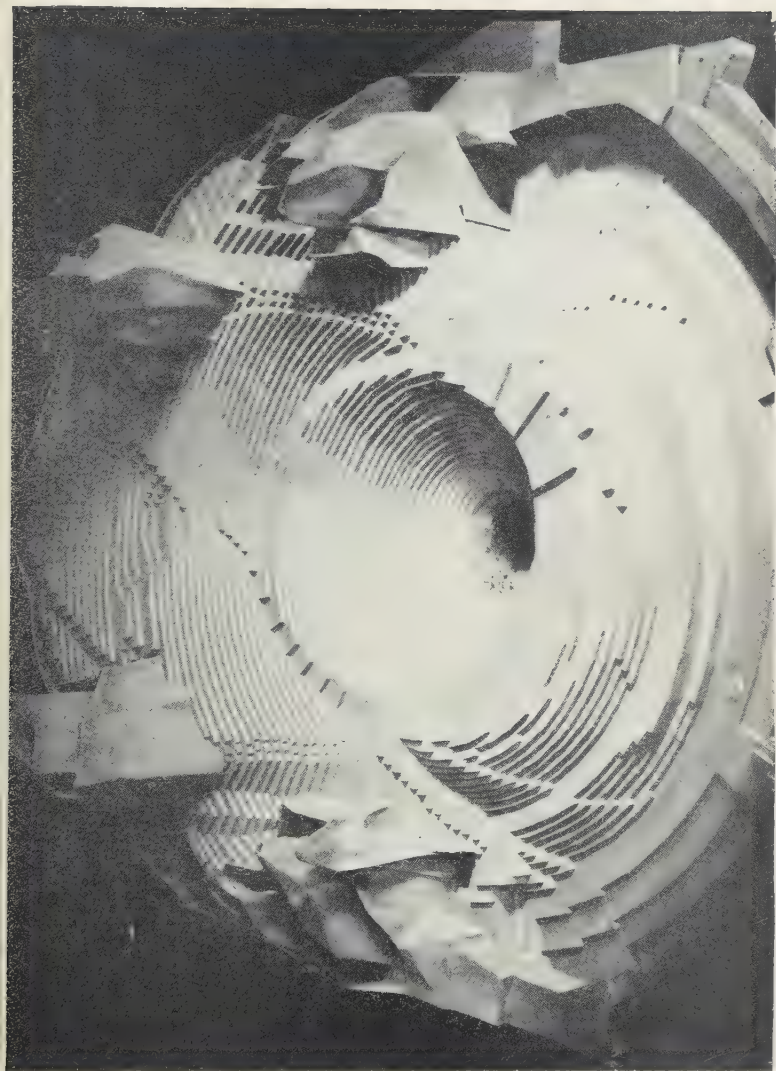
The German theatre is admirable first of all for its sense of ensemble, its reverence for the whole effect. German acting, moreover, does the folk thing well, the obstinacy of revolutionary motives, the vagaries of ordinary comedy. It has audacity, too, and this—though often unregulated by a finely civilized and urbane relaxation and choice—has given it a certain lead in the modern morbid and the bold

ventures into new fields. German acting renders profoundly the turgid deep soul. But for idealities in the realm of acting, the great typical tragic emotion or the humorous ideality of farce, it falls short in style, in a spacious and open universality of emotion and form.

Style is what the French have over all other stages, a sense of smart completion and taste and vivacious precision. And their greatest actors have style, also, in the greatest sense. In acting, as elsewhere, supreme style derives from a combination of sensibility and calculation, and moves toward the ideal of distinction with a touch in it of conscious elaboration or artifice. There is, of course, a vast amount of bad acting in France; but at its best French acting may easily be called the most discreet, the best regulated, the best placed of all. It exhibits not seldom a brilliantly observed propriety that might be said to affect one, as Henry James declared it affected him, as an almost celestial order. But it pays all too frequently for that kind of excellence. For this polish and effect of completeness French acting often pays in its imaginative limitations and in a sort of urban paucity of light and wings and devastating

beauty of soul; it has the merits and the defects of its native genius.

Italian and Russian acting are beautiful in their naturalness. They evince the quality of naturalness in its most complete and inclusive sense. Both, according to the temperaments they express, are supremely free and natural in their use of an essentially artistic technic and endowment. Both have abundance, gusto, a passionate vitality, and soul. The Russian carries intensity farther in than the Italian likes. His psychology is emotional and warm and dark, where the Italian's is sharp and fiery and clear and intellectualized. Russian and Italian acting in the best examples have much in common: a profound and exalted simplicity in their truthfulness and realism, a magnificent dignity and grave, warm beauty like nature's. And Italian acting at its best, may, I think, be said to excel the Russian only in one respect, which, for want of a better phrase, I may call a kind of civilized distinction. It has not only the security and conviction of emotional power and resource, but also an ease and a secure relaxation that rests on centuries of experience and thought. The great faults of Italian act-



The Dante model, designed by Norman-Bel Geddes for a production of "The Divine Comedy."



Another effect produced with the Dante model

ing are laziness, noise, and superfluous gesture, the use of conventional theatre business to save thought and labor. The same essential endowment for acting that makes the Italian achieve supreme excellence in it, makes him capable of the worst of the faults characteristic of this particular art. No acting is worse than the worst Italian. At its best Italian acting achieves a beautiful suavity of method, a spontaneity, a fluidity, and a fine relation between the inner and outer parts of the human organism. Italian acting at its best has a kind of distinguished actuality. It has the poetic realism that one finds in early Renaissance marbles, the Guidarello Guidarelli at Ravenna, for example, where the life within and the surface without seem to be one, and where nature in its outer representation is so exact, so delicate, so quivering and so exquisite that it is inseparable from the life within.

The actor's gift begins first of all with his body. In all countries and in all acting the measure of an actor's gift comes back to his body, comes back to the absorbing and revealing magnetism of his presence there which is the focus of our mood. A man's acting comes

back to his body in the same sense exactly that all life, sensibility of perception and impression, and accuracy of general intelligence, come back to the body, to physical senses, to the earth. One of the first tests of an actor's talent is in the identity of his body and his mind. Not the actor's voice, not his brain, are the parts of him by which he becomes a medium for his art; it is his whole make-up, body, brain, and voice; it is the man you see before you on the stage. In fine acting the words and the body are at supreme moments inseparably one, and they can be said to be interchangeable in meaning and significance. It is not that the emotion is transferred from speech into a mimicry of gesture and facial play, not that—though the mere gift of miming need not be despised. It is that the idea that moves within becomes one with the outward form. The highest use of the body, of gesture, is not to reproduce, but to represent, with an added radiance, what is within, not, that is, to be an image but a symbol; the living content of the moment charges with its power the body that it animates, and makes it a symbol of its meaning. The idea that gathers up all its elements, the social, the ethical,

the animal, into one thing in terms of the body, takes on magnificent power. The body, moreover, speaks to the eye, which is the door for so much of our experience. Gesture in some instances has a power beyond that of words, however splendid their golden eloquence may be. Gestures may give a concrete and arresting statement, a definite and convincing visual phenomenon that states the point as no words could ever do. The music of beautiful words spreads over and beyond the words themselves and their usual meaning into a beautiful immortality, into something less definite and more idea. And the flow of lines, the shifting emphasis of the actor's body, may weave an abstraction of design that has in it also some of the wider truth of music.

And acting itself is the body of the art of the theatre.

Acting has the same relation to the theatre that the body has to the expression of a man's life. And acting has the merits and the defects of the human being himself. Through its magnetism and its sensitive and expressive powers acting may serve to create the most beautiful ends, and even to carry the idea farther than

the dramatist himself had ever conceived it. Or through laziness and egotism and stupidity acting may very well obstruct some great vision that from some great soul in the theatre arises. But it remains, nevertheless, the unescapable medium; and it can no more be kept out of account than the body can in the problem of one's living. Gordon Craig may wish to substitute marionettes for actors in the theatre; and Duse may say that to save the theatre we must first kill all the actors. But all this is only as great saints or fanatical dreamers in every century may have wished to rid themselves of the body, to stand free of the shackles of the flesh. And such a will as theirs, however haughtily it sets itself against the natural world that feeds and brings them up, has for certain spirits its shining fruits, even though when carried to its conclusion it is only a kind of divine nonsense, a mad symbol of beautiful desire. It is the dream of not existing in order to exist more completely. It is the nostalgia of the soul, solitary forever, for itself alone. It has something in it of that solemn verdict of those early fathers in Byzantium that the only salvation for the race of man was that no

more children should be born into the world. And it represents a phenomenon that occurs in every art, the desire to escape from the art's medium. A simple pianist might wish the piano to sound like a harp. A visionary sculptor would like sculpture to be painting. A certain kind of poet wants poetry to be indistinguishable from music. And dreamers in the theatre move often toward some bastard or diverse art. But in the art of the theatre everything depends on two things: The first is the fundamental, natural base that nurtures it, which is the human quality of the actors. The second is the progression and sublimation of this fundamental material in the direction of idea. In the theatre, as in all life, vitality is sustained through a perpetual struggle of matter and idea and the eternal and delicately changing balance between them.

That acting, like religion and literature, should be felt as common knowledge among so many men who are by no means expert in them, is a disadvantage to its clarity and to the security of its theory and outline. Acting suffers through a closeness to life that makes it seemingly as an art or science more negligible than some arts

appear to be. We forget with too much ease the delicacy and the security necessary to separate acting from life and make it an art. Acting suffers from a reliance on mere seeming actuality, a fact that establishes one of the reasons for actors having been despised as mere apes and copyists and their art denied its right to be called so. Acting suffers, too, as life suffers, from a sort of evanescence, the moment of it passes and is gone, as a passion or a deed grows dim at last. But as with religion and literature, this very closeness to life is acting's greatest asset, the evidence of its human immediacy and of the direct instinct with which we turn to it as a way of carrying on our living.

And in the end, when all is said, humanity is but a microcosm; and we merely perceive little sets of relationships that we call the universe. In this little universe of ours we are turning always toward some manifestation of our life in the person of some figure in it, some fellow vehicle and exemplar of living. The function of acting is to express in terms of a human body some vibrant region of this life of ours; to set before our eyes some epitome of man's vitality; to add to the character and event some

element of abstraction that goes beyond and above them, something of that pure and separable element that arises from every artistic expression. For one of the finest ends of acting is to weave an abstract pattern, some pattern of idea, something approaching pure design in its ideality. This makes a kind of truth in itself. It can exist apart from its immediate implication; and may remain with us as beautiful even when the precise moment that conveyed it fades, as the soul might remember the noble harmony of the lines in some forgotten scene. This is the object of all art, to create in reality abstraction and in abstraction reality; to complete, in sum, our living for us. It is this that gives to art something of the quality of a dream, the fear for its possibility, the urgency of its desire. And it is this in art that makes life follow it.

1. Have you seen a performance by some actor in which you felt that he had behind it and within himself a fine conception or idea, but failed to get it expressed in his actual playing?

2. Make a distinction between him as an artist and as an actor. On what grounds could you make the statement?

3. Does Charlie Chaplin, who is a very fine actor, use a realistic method? In this respect how does he differ from Douglas Fairbanks or Mary Pickford?

4. What do you mean by a realistic play? What do you mean by realistic acting as distinguished from poetic or from stylized acting?

5. Is most of the acting that you have seen realistic? How does it differ from that of two generations ago, as you gather from the accounts of the time? How is this evinced in the general repertory of plays to be found in our present-day theatre? Mention a list of the season's plays in the New York of Booth's day as compared with a list from the year 1923-24. (See Burns Mantle.)

6. In John Barrymore's art of acting precisely what corresponds to the pigment of Corot's palette, to Kreisler's violin, to the marble of Michelangelo? In sum, what is the actor's medium?

7. In acting, what corresponds to the trees and landscape that Corot recorded in the *Ville d'Avray*; to the thought and emotional experience that Kreisler expresses in music; to the human body that Michelangelo portrayed in *Il Pensiero*? In sum, what is the actor's material?

II

NOTES ON ACTING

MOVEMENT IN ACTING

WHEN you hear a man like Mr. George Copeland play Bach and afterward a Spanish habanera, you get the sense of something fundamentally musical, something that begins with the first phrase and goes on unbroken to the last note of the composition. There is no rapidity and no pause that does not exist in relationship to what is before and after it. The whole of it is one rhythm, one magnificent and infectious continuity. Such playing of such music is like a fine piece of architecture in which the entire unity of all the parts appears and every part takes its life from the whole. The whole progression moves steadily, it is varied but unbroken.

The secret of gesture in acting lies in the fact that there is no movement and no part of any movement that means anything in itself, but only as it ensues from what comes before and proceeds into what comes after. If an actress

puts her hand on a man's shoulder the mere moment of the hand's presence has no life in it and no effect. The gesture must begin in the shoulder; proceeding from the whole body, and even from the whole state of mind, perhaps, it arrives slow or fast at length at its objective. But even while it appears to rest there it carries with it the change in position by which it arrived, and it should have about it a sense of its departure from where it is. If an actor enters a room the secret of the movement of entering lies in his establishing a continuous relationship between the door from which he appears and the place that he is headed for. When that fundamental is established, the actor may walk as fast or as slow as he likes, without blurring the idea.

Chaliapin, when the ghost comes to Boris and he drops to his knees on the floor, has in reality only three or four patterns of movement; but these are so related to his entire body and so continuous among themselves that they are able to convey the immense meaning behind them. No little of the secure effect of Charlie Chaplin's pieces of business is due to the fact that, from start to finish, a scene of

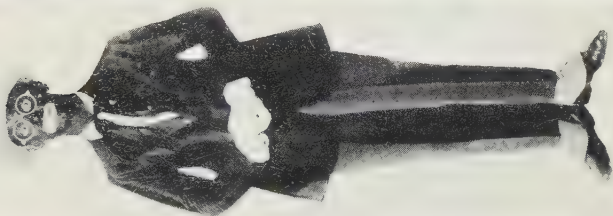
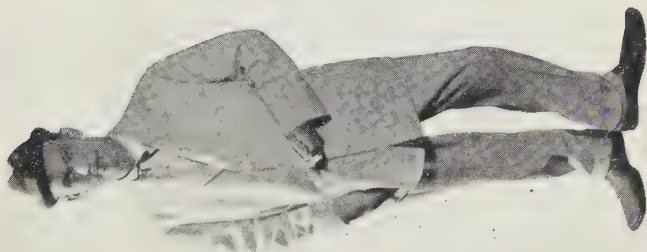
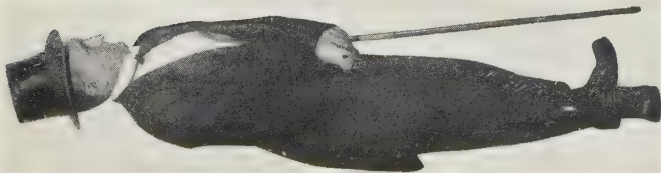
his possesses an unbroken flow, like music. If an actor raises his hands in supplication toward the sky, the sense of elevation and entreaty will come not only from the gesture's flowing upward to its seeming resting-place, but also from the presence in the resting hands of their going down again to the sides; the truth of the pause exists only in the relation of the pause to what it is, in fact, but a change in movement from. Duse's bow before the curtain was expressive because it seemed not a mere bending at the hips, but rather to include everything from the feet on which she stood to the thought in her mind and the gentleness of her lowered eyelids. The purity of a gesture consists in the unmarred flow of it through the changes that are related to itself; and its purity of line is lost when these relationships are broken or confused. The average actor makes bad gestures because he can neither think nor move except in patches and unrelated instances.

Art is a process of expressing one part of life in terms of another. An architect expresses the life of his dreams and ideas in terms of his life with visual solid forms. A singer may pour into sound his erotic experience. For this reason it

is true that art is not art at all except in so far as it is alive. The characteristic of the living is that it never is at rest but is a perpetual rhythm of change. A moment approaches its most complete establishment, it arrives, but even as it arrives it is breaking down into what comes after. Save for this rhythm toward and from itself, it would be dead; it is alive only in this relative life. The same holds true of all movement on the stage; all of it derives from an unbroken rhythm of the actor's thought, and is alive only within a rhythm of the body that from the actor's entrance to his exit is continuous.

SPEED

No end of the difficulties in the New York serious theatre would be avoided or halved, at least, if the producers insisted more on speed in speaking, and if the actors trained for it. Speed in enunciation and delivery of lines. In such a play as Regnard's *Le Légataire Universel* at the Comédie Française, or *Le Cid* or a modern piece like *Les Marionnettes*, the actors take speeches in something like a third of the time that a speech of the same length would



On the right, Charlie Chaplin, who has the spirit and art of all the Comm-dia; next, Eddie Cantor in black face comedy, who is like old Arlecino; the next is James Barton, who is like the Zanni Brighella; and Herbert Williams, who corresponds to Dottori.



The kind of art that comes off best in the American theatre is not found in the legitimate, so-called, but in vaudeville houses and, even better, scattered through musical comedies, revues, and burlesques. The parallel of this American theatrical form is the Italian *Commedia dell'Arte*, which, after two hundred years of existence, reached its zenith toward the end of the seventeenth century and slowly declined to the end of the eighteenth. The study of the *Commedia dell'Arte* throws much light on the kind of tradition that lies behind this American form and on the possibilities of its future development.

Every character in the *Commedia* was to be identified by two fixed elements, his costume and his mask. The leading characters were the two old men, *Pantalone*, who corresponds to the American business man of vaudeville skits, and *Dottore* and the first and second *Zanni*, who went by various names, though the first *Zanni* was usually called *Brighella*, also called *Petrolino*, whence the later French *Pierrot*. The second *Zanni* was *Arlecino*. The Neapolitan *Punch* was another. The figure to the left is *Arlecino*. To the right is *Brighella*, the smart servant, quick, cunning, the worker of intrigue, the most powerful character in the *Commedia*.

require on our stage. This, of course, is due in part to the language, since the lack of a strong tonic accent in French and the frequent liaison permit a much greater rapidity of utterance. But it comes partly also from the training and care that these French actors exercise to acquire mere speed. The tirades, then, for the French, those long discourses so much objected to by their English critics, become another thing, and say more and take no longer than many of the speeches in our theatre.

Of all this *Back to Methuselah* was a good instance. In those scenes—to take a less tiresome example of Shaw's garrulity in this play—where the Brothers Barnabas explain their doctrine, much would be gained if the actors sat still, took each other's speeches up immediately, with distinct and precise enunciation, and heightened the speed at which the lines are given. This would be artificial, yes, but that has no point, for the scenes in themselves are patently dialogue statements of ideas. Pottering about, changing positions, climbing on furniture, looking out of windows and the like, trying to make these scenes seem real, can accomplish only a childish rubbish of illusion.

These scenes are a dramatist's convention from the start, and to admit them frankly as such only keeps the art of them intact. For this speed, of course, there would have to be concentration on the precise accent of word and on the sense accent; and there would have to be trained lips, tongue, and breathing. There would have to be vivacity of tone, concentration on the values of emphasis and idea, and smart accuracy of phrase. But what else is an artist on the stage for?

TEMPO

If you listen in the New York theatre you will very commonly hear actor after actor take the tempo of his speech from the speech that has just been spoken. And so it happens sometimes that for a whole scene the tempo of all the speeches have about the same measure. I doubt if the average producer ever thinks one way or the other about the subject.

But the vitality behind dramatic art makes it necessarily true that every part has in itself its general tempo, its time-pattern; and the same is true of every single speech. What is true of visual design is true for the ear also:

that every section of a play is a time-centre in itself, to which surrounding parts are related; all these centres in their turn are related to larger centres, and so on.

A study of tempo by our actors would help mend two of the worst faults on our stage, monotony and lack of speed. And the achievement of more variety and speed would help to clear away the idly imitative, the realistic clutter now so much in the way of the art of the theatre. And finally a study of tempo leads to better diction, to more flexible characterization, and to a sharper impress of the dramatic pattern involved.

INCLUSIVENESS

When Mr. Edward Johnson of the Chicago Opera Company conceived the part of Pinkerton, he chose the right direction. The character has never been popular with audiences. They have never liked this picture of a young naval officer who betrays the woman that loves him, and then sails away and deserts her. What could an artist do, I fancy Mr. Johnson reflected, to make this part less repellent and more tragic and moving? What profoundly

human—and so more easily forgivable, or at least understandable—motives might there conceivably be that would account for such an action and such callousness of heart? Mr. Johnson ended by creating a young man lifted and carried away by the glamour of the East, its romance and exotic horizons. Into this world of his imagination the woman came; through it he saw her, and her love for him may have grown to meet this excitement, this glow, this tender intensity in him. He, as well as she, was the victim of forces stronger than himself. So that his cruelty was one of the defects of an excellence.

This conception of the part was permissible enough, and as true, for that matter, as any other. And it has the advantage over the usual conception of Puccini's hero, the betrayer of the passing-whim-of-a-man theme, because it brings into action more of life; it includes more of what we are or may be. It is not so easy as that average conception, which settles the matter very simply; but it is more persuasive and moving because it is more beautiful. It is darker and more distressing in the end because it covers more of life, and is there-



Some masks make ugly faces but terrible things presented and in themselves expressive. Jaki's mask is a terrible instrument, only as it differs from his face. To a clown, whose art is devoid the motion of words and is conveyed only through creative pantomime, such a mask is like a great voice to a singer.



In every art the nature of the medium itself in any particular piece of work may play a large part. In a piece of sculpture, for instance, the particular block of marble used may by its texture and color go a long way toward the complete effect that the sculptor wishes to achieve. The particular quality of some voice may express much of the musical idea that some song may have to express. In the same way a face may in itself be an expressive dramatic medium, which is to say that there are lines and mass conformations about this face that, either still or in motion, can express and project over the footlights certain qualities.

In the picture above we have a mask, from the Museum of Natural History, made by an artist, of the American Indians of the northwest coast, who has created upon it certain characteristics or qualities which it expresses and projects. It may serve to isolate for you that part of the player's acting endowment that we call his mask.

fore more widely indicative, less incidental or individual, and more fatally expressive. It carries farther and is more tragic because, by depicting them as working on all the characters, it leaves more exposed the forces that are at work. And as the development of a rôle for an artist it all rests on a deeper and more significant method.

Realism is partly responsible for this narrowing and hardening of motives, and character-drawing in the theatre. Realism constantly manifests an anxiety to explain. In its anxiety to give an account of things or to present them uncolored by mystery and sentiment, realism remains ill at ease with the inexplicable. But since their inexplicability is always a part of the vitality of all things, it follows that realism to get its focus must tend to narrow or exclude.

For the average actor this, of course, is the easiest way to go. It creates a seeming actuality for him of logic or science, with which he can be more comfortable in elaborating his part. It makes life seem to work, to fit into our statement of it. But art of importance never makes life work, never puts things into

a plausible nutshell, never quite. The clever and the profound thing for any actor in any part is always, in so far as he does not falsify what is intended by the author, to study the part in the light of human nature at its richest and most luminous. The whole success of every piece of art depends finally on the extent to which the outline of its essential character is kept and yet at the same time is filled with possible implications, with means to enlarge and deepen our response to it.

OBVIOUS AND INEVITABLE

Without meaning to in the least, I startled a company of art-lovers by saying that a certain actress-singer was nearly always obvious. She had few tricks, I said, that would not be obvious to the merest nursery-maid in the gallery and would not be expected and exploited by this maid.

To this the host replied that these things were obvious, yes, but all great art was obvious. Obvious and simple, he said.

And just there we touch on one of the main points in the art of the theatre. A great moment in this art is not obvious. In the end it

may be so, after the moment is accomplished, but not till then. What such a moment is, is not obvious, it is inevitable.

Obvious means that the thing stands out as what we expected, as what would more or less naturally ensue. In this obviousness there is a sense of completeness not because the moment and its implications are exhausted but because it seems wound up, finished up, or amazingly exploded; it seems to say to us, There You Have It. Nazimova in one of her pieces of business in *Hedda Gabler* is obvious. It is when Hedda is left alone there in the room while the men go out to seek Eilert. Nazimova in this scene wears a black gown, an enveloping sort of robe it is. She goes over to the door, closed against her exit and leading to the world outside, and beats her hands desperately against it. Then she turns and falls back against the door, her arms extended in a cross, and at this point a great splash of crimson flames out where her robe falls open and shows its lining. You wince at the obviousness of it. Mary Garden has fine moments and some fine devices, but much of her business sticks out as mere business, focussed and

held by her personal magnetism; and the sense of inventiveness protrudes rather shamelessly. The dumbest person in the house can see that it must be effective. And the common stage, of course, abounds—and unfailingly—with a less inventive form of the obvious, things done that we all entirely expect, that we were born into, that are imitated or plagiarized or traditional.

Inevitable means quite another thing, something that may proceed from the same source as these more obvious devices but exceeds them. Inevitable means that it has something to it that we expected and yet did not expect. It means something that seems unescapable after it is done; and it bears so on the point to be revealed in the moment that only expert eyes can see it as business, the rest of the audience take it as something necessarily there, which is exactly what they should do. When the inevitable is achieved, the moment and its implications are not exhausted at all. And they seem complete not only because they appear to belong absolutely to the occasion but also because they allow for infinite radiation, for infinite possibilities of truth and revelation.

A thing in acting seems inevitable because it surprises and satisfies us at once; and because it creates a something there which was not there before. The obvious is like the writing in a copy-book or like an adding-machine; it is all there, or it may startle and delight with its striking inventiveness, but so it ends. The inevitable is like the sun on the wall; it is simple, complete too, but infinitely subtle, full of nuance, inexhaustible. Sarah Bernhardt was often obvious, if any one ever was; but very often the obvious with her was lifted out of that plane by style, great recreative style; and real style, involving as it does the mystery of personality, can never be obvious.

And great art is simple only through the fact that it discovers the inevitable something that will give it unity.

1. What diverse kind of speed would suit respectively the last act of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, the screen scene in *The School for Scandal*, the closet scene in *Hamlet*, the whole of Lady Gregory's *Workhouse Ward*? The speed in each of these instances is a part of the scene. There is a speed that is approximately right for any scene, as distinguished from any other scene.

2. Can you designate for yourself an actor in the theatre or moving pictures whose interest has been chiefly created for you by press publicity, so that you go to see him rather than his performance?

3. What is the difference between speed and tempo?

4. Make a distinction between having a dramatic personality and having an ability to act.

III

ILLUSION AND WONDER

ILLUSION IN ACTING

THE accident of the medium employed happens in the art of acting to be the cause of many confusions in the theories of the art; and of these the worst concerns illusion.

In the art of music nobody but the simplest creature expects the sound to deceive us by making us think it a storm, or pasture bells, a waterfall, or anything whatever but music. Even if a piece of music is called *The Storm*, most people know too much to demand that the stormy sounds be heard in it always, or even from time to time. Almost any one knows that a great composer might write a piece of music about Niagara Falls that would never in the least portray the falls, but would express what might be called in words the idea of the individual's relation to the universe, or of time to eternity, and so imitate little of the roar and thunder of water. In architecture everybody knows enough not to demand that a façade

look like a forest or an ocean or a turtle or a hat, or anything else in the visible world; everybody understands that music and architecture, and some few at least that painting and poetry, are purely themselves and complete in themselves.

But in the art of acting it happens that the medium employed is very close to the result achieved. The actor who plays Hamlet is a man with a body, a voice, a mind; and so is Hamlet. A man loves, hates, fears, dies, and so does Hamlet. The resemblance in this case between the medium and the art makes a perception of the nature of the art itself more difficult. And what this does for the average man is to lead him to assume that the business of acting is to duplicate something that he has seen. He sets himself up as judge, then, in what he takes to be a matter of imitation, reproduction, verisimilitude. In this bit of art, he may tell himself, as he settles into his seat, he can feel at home.

This whole point of view and assumption falls over its own feet at many turns. In the first place it assumes that there is some fixed aspect of things, that there is always some *is-*

ness for every one to see, if he can only see it; and this is by no means certain. It assumes, also, that the average man will know the perfect reproduction, the resemblance, the verisimilitude, when it arrives. But that does not hold either; for the average man does not know the color of his uncle's eyes, the tone of red roses in the moonlight, or even whether a cow's ears, though he has seen a thousand cows, are above or below the horns, or where. And lastly it assumes reproduction as the final measure of approval and the final perfection in acting, and so establishes the test of identity; the actor should not act the character, the actor should be the character. But obviously art is art, not life. The pleasure we get in art is not that it is the same thing as its subject, but that it is different. We go to see the stars floating on the waves not because they are, but because they are not, the stars in the sky. The charm of art is not duplication, but presence and absence, likeness and unlikeness. The truth of art lies not in reproduction or duplication, but in idea.

The theory of acting which demands illusion may not seem in itself so bad, since art is art,

not æsthetics. If people receive the experience to be conveyed by a work of art, if they respond to it, it may not seem so important what æsthetic or moral explanation they contrive after the experience. If a man is in love, it does not so much matter immediately what are the explanations and comments that he gets up about it. But in the end this explanation and theory does matter, because it affects the progress of his love and its movement toward perfection; it affects also the relation of this particular experience, this love, to the rest of his life and all life. And so the disaster about this business of illusion's being the end to be desired in acting arises from the fact that such a theory is harmful in two respects. It does not allow the artist to judge the distance from reality that he will choose to make when he sets about creation. And it leads the audience to judge a work of art by its subject-matter.

It ought to be obvious that an artist must be free to choose—always at his own peril—the degree of actuality that he wishes to preserve in his art. He can be as photographic or as conventional or abstract as he likes, always at his own risk. He may paint a tree as Gains-

borough paints it, pushing natural masses toward the character of tapestry, or as Corot paints a tree, drowsy with vague mists and a dream of light, or as El Greco paints a tree, taking from it only those forms that may go up as lines and shadows in that ascending flame of his composition, or as Hokusai or some more ancient painter in China might do, seeking from the tree only a line, a pattern of nuance. It is not the distance from actuality that the tree painting must stand or fall by, but by itself, by the idea expressed in it. All of which means only that a work of art is complete in itself. You judge it first by its intention, its idea, and finally by the value or significance of this idea to you. And a work of art is art only in so far as it can be experienced as complete in itself; and—though it may gain in depth and appeal by its subject—the sheer element of art in it exists only in so far as it is essentially free of its subject.

The illusion theory blinds its followers to the very first thing necessary to know of acting, which is that acting, in so far as it is an art at all, and not mere human material that on the stage remains human material and nothing

else, is a language we must learn to read. In this respect it is precisely like music, painting, or any other art. Not knowing this, people conclude, merely because of the closeness of the material to the result, that they can be at home with acting; and that they need for it only what they need in life generally, sharp eyes, feelings, memory, and interest. To perceive acting they need to know men, places, and events, of course, as a painter needs to know a tree when he sees one, or a dancer to know his legs from his arms. But these are the barest beginnings of observation. What most people have observed of men, places, and events is a puny bit of knowledge indeed. If that is what they go by in knowing acting as one of the arts, they may as well deal with architecture also by knowing bricks from paper boxes. The side of acting which is art and not nature is as much of a special dialect as architecture is, and with more difficulty isolated and learned.

People say, meaning to bestow a great compliment, that an actor playing a hobo is a hobo. If this were true, it would clearly be as good to see the hobo and never go to see the actor at all. People will say that when an actor as

Hamlet dies you feel that he is dead. If such things be true it might be better to take these characters and events as we find them in life, and go to the theatre only to see what we can see nowhere else, as we go to an aquarium to see the fish we cannot see in the pantry. But in that case we could not talk at all of illusion in the theatre; because, not being able to see elsewhere what is to be seen there, we could judge it only by what we see on the stage. Obviously—too obviously—then, an actor is not the character he acts. And the lowest form of acting—not necessarily the worst performance, of course—is mere impersonation, in so far as it tries exactly to copy the original person, which, of course, no good impersonator does. It is the same with the incident portrayed. What the actor does need not fool us by making us think that the thing is actually happening to him.

As for emotional illusion the point remains the same. In order to convey to us the emotion in its essential quality, the actor must give us the effect of feeling it, otherwise the emotion is interfered with by a defect in the medium through which it is expressed. This

does not imply that we must be certain that the actor at the time feels the emotion, though it should not occur to our minds at the moment that he does not; all we need is that he give us the emotion free and pure in itself; the rest is his affair. All we can ask of the actor is that he should discover what the emotion is and possess the means to convey it to us. The significant actor, like any artist in any art, uses as much actual, photographic reality and reproduction as he requires. He uses the illusion of being the character, duplicating externals, feeling the emotions, undergoing the incident, exactly as a painter uses natural objects or men. The art of acting, since it works in a material of men and actions to create actions and men, may use this duplication or reproduction more often than the other arts, no doubt, but the principle of its use is the same.

What the actor gives us is a reality and no illusion. It is truth, not lies. He creates, embodies, isolates his ideal; but he depends ultimately on no deception. He gives us an essential, the idea, the characteristic, the personage, the point, as related to itself and to life outside itself. He can simulate and counterfeit exter-

nals, but only in order to give us his truth, which does not stand or fall by the extent to which we are fooled into believing it. When an actor does a torture scene we are harrowed and sickened not because we think him tortured, but because we receive from him at that moment an idea of torture so compelling that it moves us, moves us more powerfully, perhaps, than the sight of the same blood and wounds in life might have done. He does not blur any truth but that of mere accidental externality. He does not, in so far as he is good, blur truth at all, but isolates and intensifies it to fuller power.

The test of acting as an art consists in the extent to which its effect depends on some illusion that you undergo. Say, for instance, an actress plays a scene in which a woman is beaten and killed by her son. You can test the art of such a scene by how much it loses its effect upon you when on your way home you are reminded that it was only a play after all, that it was not the real woman who was killed, after all, but only the actress, who was not so dead at this moment as to prevent her having a cup of tea. If the pressure of the scene can

be relieved for you by such a reminder, the acting was of small importance.

The test of your approach to acting as an art consists—exactly as it does in painting—in the extent to which you depend on illusion for your ultimate satisfaction.

For what has come off from that scene, if it was greatly acted, in no matter what style or school, is only a greater truth; the actor gives you the eternity of love, grief, and death; you are moved as by a great building, or poem, or great music. The art of acting in that scene is ultimately to be judged by the completeness and significance of its idea. Every work of art endures at last not by its likeness to things outside itself, but by the depth and freedom of the content that it embodies and expresses.

MINOR EXHIBITIONISTS

Among our actors nowadays there is many a one who, if I should say “Remember to hold your upper lip that way when you say the word *bitter*,” would turn on me with contempt or rage, meaning that I should know better than to say that sort of thing to an actor; it makes him self-conscious. And if I say to a certain

young actress that she is to take the first three words in her speech staccato and raise her chin as she delivers them, she will complain that she cannot feel natural doing it that way. And if I urge another to find one particular gesture for a certain passage and, having got it, to do nothing else every night but that gesture, memorizing its exact line, I shall be rebuked as trying to make acting artificial.

I might reply to these actors that I am not so much concerned with their being natural as I am with their being interesting; I might say that an actor's business in his art is to learn to use his self-consciousness as he uses any other part of himself; I might say many other things; and it would come to little. What is in these people's heads is the notion that acting must be themselves, and that they must feel the thing they are trying to do, and then act it according to their feelings. They are taking an ingenuous view of art, a middle-class dislike for the admission of artifice and arrangement. They dislike to think that the mind arranges and designs the final expression of the moment of acting; according to them this must arise straight from the actor's feelings at the time.

But feeling the scene is something that no actor can forever depend on; he may upon occasions feel the scene more or less, feel it as before or differently, or not at all. And even if he could be sure of the right excitement within himself, he must remember that the art of acting does not consist only of what is felt, much of it lies in the external means by which feeling is conveyed. The health of acting—as of any other art or of life—is strictly related to the inner experience's arriving at some outer form, without which it never comes wholly into being. And so it is essential that each of these felt moments on the actor's part must find its visual image or embodiment. In this respect a great art in acting would share the character of nature itself; in which the form evinced—the rose, the tiger, the tree—is inseparable from the idea or soul within it; the actor's gesture would image the life within him and the life in him inform the gesture.

Obviously, however, in the acting of a dramatic moment, there are, among the various reactions that the actors may feel, some that are more enduring and significant than others. They go farther, mean more, have more con-

tent; and the definite and conscious effort to remember them and to conjure them up again may be of advantage. Meanwhile the fact remains that the process of art is one of alternate inspiration and memory. As the artist works and as he returns again and again to the work, he discovers in himself something that seems suddenly to forward the conception and revelation that his art undertakes. This happy something, often not consciously expected or prepared for, he will recognize, and will strive to remember in order that he may revive it. And so, with one discovery and invention after another, and the memorizing and repeating of them, he may bring into his final expression of the moment such radiant elements as may best create it into a form of art. Among these radiant elements there will be some that are gestures, visible bodies of the ideas working in him, and these, too, he will memorize and repeat.

The ideal for the actor would, of course, be that he should be able after due work and inspiration to arrive at some emotion or idea that discovers the profoundest quality in the dramatic moment, the deepest inclusion of life in

it; and that every time he acts the moment he should, out of his great genius, recover perfectly and with luminous precision this experience; and that this truth should every time achieve exactly the gesture most capable of embodying and conveying it.

This would be ideal, and no argument about it.

But all things in life and art, as we know too well, are subject to imperfection. And the fact remains, more or less apart from all this, that for an emotion we may discover a gesture, a visual movement or line, that can take on a life of its own and can go on conveying successfully an idea to us regardless of what the actor himself may come to feel at the time he is making it. That gesture, then, will be the one that he must use. The most desirable end would be, of course, that the actor fill up the gesture whenever he uses it with the original emotion from which it derived. But often, if one or the other, either the new feeling or the arranged gesture, must be sacrificed, it is better to lose the feeling and keep the gesture.

To deny this and to insist, as so many actors do, and some schools of acting also, on some

direct and ingenuous relation always of what they do on the stage to what they feel in themselves at the time, is only to evince a foolish individualism and personal insistence; and to suffer from a kind of exhibitionism by which you will to show yourself willy-nilly; and to make your art the immediate exhibition of whatever you are at the moment, as if it were yourself and not the moment that is the thing to be shown.

This insistence is not only vulgar and insignificant; it shows an ignorance of the essential character of form and of the nature of all art and all creation, which is constantly releasing forms that possess their own separable and independent life and meaning.

And finally, there is something uncultured and barbarous in this whole attitude. The physical body achieves forms and forces that can bridge it over the times when it is not functioning at its best; a man achieves ideas and moral conceptions that carry him over the inequalities and saggings of his mental and moral existence; men in societies achieve laws and systems that sustain the life of the group when conditions falter; and so with the achievements of sus-

taining forms in an art. Culture, as distinguished from mere instinct and improvisation, begins with the knowledge of this fact.

There was a moment in *Œdipus Rex* as Mounet-Sully played it when Œdipus is reduced to the last despair; everything has been taken from him, his honor, his children, his mother and wife, his kingdom and friends. And when he came to this point Mounet-Sully descended the palace steps and lay down flat on the ground. At every performance and on the same word he did that. In that gesture the whole moment was revealed; his body went back again to the bosom of the earth from which it came; he was a part of the doom and motherhood of nature; in him human life returned to its first elements. Once achieved, that gesture almost departed from any mood that the actor himself might have at any performance of the scene. It had become more important than any mood that he might have. In it Mounet-Sully had discovered a something that goes on even now in my mind as the most essential idea and tragic content of that scene. He had found what became the body of the idea, something as inevitable and complete as music.

WONDER IN ACTING

The prosaic or unimportant actor, if he works seriously, can satisfy his audience by getting what they expect. In a scene, a line, an emotional reaction, he produces an effect that can be seen at once to be what was due; it is sensible and reasonable. And what this actor does at these satisfactory and gratifying moments is not wrong; it violates no probability but takes its place in the logical sequence of the emotion, the idea, the situation. It can be workmanlike, ample, and commendable. Such an actor will win nods of approval from all over the house. He is a good, working journeyman.

The important actor is not like this. What he does is true and satisfying, also, unless it be at times too much of a strain for people incapable of response or understanding or sympathetic energy. What this actor does also fits the sequence of the emotion, the idea, the situation. But it is never wholly expected. There is about all talent—which is the thing that makes a piece of art living instead of dead—about all manifestations of talent, a continual slight surprise. When a real talent on the stage reads a

line or presents an emotion, we recognize the truth of it. It is reasonable to the deepest content of the moment. It satisfies our need for the suitable, the fitting; but it also delights us by something in the actor's tone, his emotional reaction, his idea, that we had no particular reason to expect; something that is a little different and additional; something, indeed, that has upon it the mystery of what is alive.

In the world of nature there is nothing—a rose, a tiger, a tree—of which we can say that we quite know what it is before it comes into actual existence. By just this identity with and this inseparability from its own creation and birth, and by just the presence in it of something that arrives only with its arrival, a living thing in nature differs from a dead thing that we might manufacture. The actor must strive always to discover for the rendering of a moment of his art, for a tone, a gesture, a piece of stage business, an element of something that could not have been foreseen or expected though it is immediately recognized as expressive and revealing; something that perhaps surprises even himself, as coming from parts of himself or sources of life which are imperfectly known by

him; something that comes into being only when the moment comes into being that it reveals and is. Only through this can he give us what is not alone an explanation of the dramatic moment but also the creation of it.

And so in the art of acting it is the revelation of some ultimate reasonableness rather than mere expected logic, of something luminous as well as convincing, that distinguishes talent from intention. There is always about a moment of fine acting a kind of fringe of wonder. A certain section of it, obviously, must satisfy mere daylight, reasonable expectation; must appear to explain itself; possess its rightness and propriety; it must accord to what we call, offhand, the mind, to the mind's consideration and exercise. But at either end of this plausible section it moves toward the farther reaches of our living, and it is like life in so far as it begins and ends in wonder.

1. Could you really say that you ever saw a fine performance during which you forgot that it was acting and not actuality? To what extent do you think this a desirable effect in the art of acting?

2. In the Closet Scene from *Hamlet*, would an actor like John Barrymore or Forbes Robertson express himself through the dramatic mood of the scene or express the dramatic mood of the scene through himself? Or is the result a satisfactory piece of art only in so far as the actor's medium—which is himself, his voice, body, et cetera—and the dramatic material become one and inseparable?

3. In every impersonation of Hamlet—or any rôle—since its first performance until to-day there is one thing that has remained the same. This is the essence, the idea, the relationship of elements that makes the essential soul of the character. This essential soul or idea has in the case of every impersonation to be translated into the terms of the medium, namely the actor. What happens is that in terms of the actor the idea is created into art.

Study the commentary on this point that is made by the following sentence from *Plotinus*:

“As the actors of our stages get their masks and their costumes, robes of state or rags, so a Soul is allotted its own fortunes, and not at haphazard, but always under a Reason: it adapts itself to the Fortunes assigned to it, ranges itself rightly to the drama, to the whole principle of the piece. Then it speaks out its own business, exhibiting at the same time all that a soul can express of its own quality, as a singer in a song. . . . But these actors, souls, hold a peculiar dignity. They act in a vaster place than any stage. The Author has made them masters of all this world.”

IV

CHARACTER ACTING

EVERYBODY has a sense of the difference between the two directions that acting takes, one implying the projection of the actor's self in terms of a character and situation, the other the creation of a distinct dramatic character with the actor as a medium. Under the first class come most of the heroes and heroines and many secondary personages in a drama, those who pass merely as figures out of life and not as "characters." Acting these parts may be described as acting straight from the actor's self. The actor creates the moods, passions, responses of the character but creates these more from within himself than by external details; which means that he draws on his sympathetic imagination to realize and present the soul, at any given moment, of the person he enacts, but does not have to undertake so much the creation of an outside that is more or less different from his own. It is his visible self, objectively seen, that he puts into the person's

place. The actor's own looks, his own imaginative feelings, are the pigments out of which the personage of the play is painted. The simulation that he employs is inward, proceeding from emotional states. The medium through which the actions and the emotional states of the personage are expressed is the actor himself as he appears in life.

The other kind is character acting. In this the actor creates out of his self and out of mimicry, make-up, and often type resemblance, a "character," characters like the miser, or tramps, cranky old ladies, beggars, irate fathers, traditional curates, Irishmen, and the like. Out of himself as a medium he creates a personage who is distinctly diverse, who is arranged, objectively seen, shaped up.

Of the first type in the supreme ranks come such actors as Duse, Bernhardt, Grasso, Edwin Booth, and in their varying degrees of importance players like Mr. John Barrymore, Miss Jane Cowl, Miss Winifred Lenihan, Miss Ethel Barrymore, Miss Helen Gahagan, Mr. Rollo Peters, Miss Eva le Gallienne, Mr. Morgan Farley, Miss Helen Chandler, and others.

Of character actors we have players like Miss

Haidee Wright, Madame Ouspenskaya, Mr. David Warfield, Coquelin, Joseph Jefferson, Mr. Dudley Digges, Mr. George Arliss, and an infinite number of others past and present, who play everything from dreaming Celtic poets to drug fiends and French noblemen. And in this group we must class players like Helen Hayes with her flapper, Glenn Anders with his Western rough, and many others who are the result of our system of casting by types. These actors are really acting pretty much their straight selves, but they are limited to one type by their resemblance to it, and so each becomes, after all, the portrayer of a "character."

That Mr. David Warfield is a character actor everybody knows. If he is to be the hero of a play, is to be the centre of our attention and poignant response, he must be so in terms of an old music-master, a pathetically humorous East Side auctioneer, or Shylock, the victim and focus of Shakespeare's romance and irony. Nobody thought of Jefferson outside of some eccentric or highly special skin, to every one he was Rip Van Winkle, old Caleb, or Bob Acres. But there are a host of actors whose case is not so clear. About many an

actor people are confused when they try to decide why he is good when he is so, or why bad. They find it hard to say in the case of such actors what their excellence is, or what is their promise or the occasion of their defeat. These players themselves would often be surprised to hear that they are essentially actors whose art prospers best within the patterns of characters.

There is some obstacle, for example, between Mr. Roland Young and his audience, some personal withholding, some complication that obstructs the plan of the delicate, witty, or poetic feeling of which he is capable. He needs the mask of a distinct character, of eccentricity, or of comic exaggeration or whim, or to work at some objective distance from himself, before he can give us all he has. Mr. Roland Young, then, is a character actor at bottom; Miss Clare Eames may or may not be one, it remains to be seen. Her most sustained and best work so far has been in character; her Prossy in Shaw's *Candida* stood out clearly and bitingly as her own; she was creating profoundly in terms of a part superficially removed from her. Mr. Lionel Barrymore's three efforts of

last season show how he can sink when he tries to give us himself, and at the same time what technical and laborious contributions he could bring to the study of a character part whose definite outline and external aspect were imposed upon him. Mr. Dwight Frye is a young character actor of great promise; Mr. Richard Bennett is a character actor with professional equipment and certainty to sustain his effects, however much or little we may like his results. Mr. Leo Carrillo, as his success in *They Knew What They Wanted* ought to show, is a character actor. And Miss Ethel Barrymore, as she grows older and suffers a decline from the freshness of her beauty into what in her case will be a beauty of personal quality and force, might well move toward the portrayal of characters; not always, but certainly from time to time. It would extend her stylistic scope and would allow her a greater use of her wit, which she now employs only in comic situations.

There are players of another sort whom character acting might give their one chance of success. To mention names might be invidious, but we all know one or more of them. Their intention toward the theatre is admi-

rable, they are excellent spirits and workers, they bring to a rôle brains and the fruits of much study, but they seem never to land their effects. In many cases such players lack the magnetism, the control, the direct instinct or whatever it is that would carry their direct selves over the footlights; but they might very well be worth while in character work, where our response to their presence on the stage is different from what it would be in a straight rôle, where our demands are less personal and of a different exaction, and where resemblances and make-ups or clever composition and technical device can take the place of direct persuasion and a more personal appeal.

To be set down as a character actor has nothing in it to chagrin a player or to cool him from the expression of his intense self. It is ultimately no less personal than the other sort of acting. The medium is arranged, but the result proceeds, as it must in all art, from the artist's self. And in the history of acting, especially before this epoch of ours in which there is such a mania for conscious self-expression, great actors were as often "characters" as not, and supreme artists played all

kinds of rôles with equal success: Garrick, for example, who portrayed a variety of parts from a London gentleman not unlike himself to a street hawker of tarts. Or, in our own times, there is Moskvin's pilgrim, that figure quivering with its truth, in Gorki's play from the lower depths of life. Or there is Mr. Arliss' Old English and his Duke of St. Olpherts, with their style, their charm, their technical finality; or Madame Ouspenskaya as the German governess in *The Cherry Orchard*, or as the peasant singer in *The Brothers Karamazov*, with her creation of beauty within the grotesque, her tragic edge and concentration, her perfect physical movement, balance on the feet, absolute timing, magnificent projection. Or Miss Haidee Wright in the character study of Queen Elizabeth, that immortal thing in our theatre that cannot be forgotten, its high, pure beauty and solitude and grim, passionate force, and to sustain it that inevitable, pure, and perfect metrical scale in the reading. We have only to remember these to know what character acting may be.

You find everywhere now a conception of acting as expression of the actor, as an exhi-

bition of the actor's emotions, his personality, his state of mind. Whereas obviously the point of acting is the expression of quality, idea, emotion, a dramatic moment. As the medium to express these, not to exhibit himself, the actor serves.

But if some one who had considered the essential nature of acting should at this juncture remind me that I myself have stated that the actor is always himself, and that he expresses every rôle he plays in terms of himself, and remains distinct from the person he enacts and not to be confused with him, I should say yes, obviously, but that the point is this: it is exactly through his use of himself to express these necessary qualities, dramatic moments, and ideas, instead of through his exhibition of himself, that the actor can at the same time create a rôle and remain himself.

If these debaters went farther and said that such an actor as Bernhardt, for example, was the same in every play, always very much Bernhardt with the same gamut of seduction, rage through tears, dying, and so on, that she either overtopped and heightened every play she exercised herself upon or else dwarfed its



That side of the actor's endowment that we call his mask may be quite apart from his talent, just as a singer may have a beautiful born voice and a poor musical sense. Or an actor may have a poor mask—cheek-bones too high for the eyes to be easily seen in the theatre, for instance—a poor mask with a great dramatic talent, as the singer may be a fine musician with a bad tongue for diction in singing.

*Taking it as a part of the medium in which an actor works as a painter works in colors, we may say that a certain mask is happily adapted for certain kinds of acting, another for another. A mask that can change little but has written upon it certain qualities of serenity and nobility may suit a great classical part, *Œdipus*, for example, where only certain large and universal phases of character and emotion are to be portrayed. A mask that is constantly in a state of change and flow of line and mass formation may suit a realism like Chekhov's "*Cherry Orchard*" or like Oswald Alving in "*Ghosts*."*

An actor is born with his mask, but can heighten it through the art of make-up. To some extent he can develop it by the study of facial motions. His mask is an important and necessary element in the actor's art, exactly as a violinist needs to possess a good violin, which is a cold necessity that no seriousness, depth of feeling, or study can quite take the place of in his final result.

The picture above is of David Garrick, the great eighteenth-century actor. His mask, in modelling, design, mobility, and distinction, and its complete range of qualities appears, from all accounts, and as we see it in portraits, to have been an ideal instrument for the actor's art.



Maria Ouspenskaya, the great character actress of the Moscow Art Theatre and lately, in English, of "The Saint" and "The Jest."

scope for her own purposes, that she did all this and yet was a great actor, I should agree entirely. But I should say that in so far as Bernhardt refused to allow a play its meaning and in all plays did pretty much the same thing, she was a limited artist. As for her being always Bernhardt, there is nothing to be said; all actors—as is true of all artists—can work only in terms of themselves. The trouble with Bernhardt was not so much that she was always only herself, but that her ideas were limited and always the same—she brought always the same conceptions to her art. Bernhardt's greatness as an actor, on the other hand, consisted in the completeness with which she could convert her own great self into theatrical terms, could, in sum, project herself into theatre. The quality and power of her was such that it presented not only herself, it had also the aspect of ideas. She was beauty, rage, seduction, death, as well as Bernhardt, and so exhibited not only herself but them.

Together with the conception of acting as pretty much a matter of exhibitionism goes the idea that acting is not a conscious feat so much as it is a natural happening. The natural has

fixed itself in the theory of acting, as it has done in gardens, painting, poetry, and other arts. Acting as a conscious art, studied, arranged, acting as design, artifice, is denied. In many arts that obsession with the natural or that fear of the designed has already spent itself and passed. In acting it sticks faster, owing partly to the peculiar relation of acting to the human medium that it employs and the direct human material out of life that it deals in, and partly to the caliber of mind and culture devoted to the theory and practice of the theatre. The appearance, in a piece of acting, of any style, formal, elaborate, archaic, symbolistic, or any style but the realistic—even though the acting achieved a triumph, as in Chaliapin's Boris or Nijinsky's Faun, or Charlie Chaplin—has very little effect on this naturalness notion, which remains the deadly same. Stated as theory, the idea seems too foolish to be credible, but you have only to use your ears and eyes to observe that most conversation about acting and most criticism of it assumes such a point of view as a matter of course, assumes that acting happens naturally, not by design or artifice or conscious craft.

But it is obvious, or ought to be, that the nature of all arts, poetry, painting, music, acting, architecture, rests on the same basis, their fundamental truths are the same. In all art the method, the form, the style, proceeds from the content, the idea to be expressed. If the quality of this content is formal, the expression is formal; if primitive, primitive; if realistic, realistic; eloquent, eloquent; and so on; a form is the natural body of the idea that it conveys; there are as many phases of the natural as there are motives to be expressed, exactly as the horse has one nature, the tree another, and to each of them its form is natural. Naturalness in the art of acting, then, is not a matter of what the actor naturally feels; it concerns the nature of what is to be expressed.

For the defects that derive from such limitations in the actor's theory of his art, character acting would be a great help. Work in "character" supplies problems farther away from the actor's own immediate self, and so avoids sheer exhibitionism. It provides a distinct outline that is not the actor's own, and that he must perceive and must create not by merely being natural but by definite means, objective

and outside himself as well as subjective; and a part of this creation is the projection of the "character" across the footlights to the audience.

The actor nowadays is apt to be afraid of this business of projection, partly because his offhand and casual theory obstructs his understanding and partly because he has seen the heavy-handed planting, as it is called, among actors of the old school, the deliberate landing of points in the lap of the audience. This frightens him, just as, in their turn, his blurring and incidental methods seem to an old timer not acting at all. The actor cannot merely exhibit himself or an idea or a dramatic moment or merely be natural on the stage. None of these becomes theatre until it is projected to the audience. Without this projection there is no acting at all, without it we have not even the sense of a dramatic personality.

A piece of character work can provide an actor with something to chew on, something to attack. It is like scales for a musician; it is like drawing from the nude and from still life, which is good for any painter, however sub-

jective and far from realism. Taking up a character quite far from himself could point the way for an actor to study his art more definitely, study it as a process involving methods, a craft with clear problems, and not merely as a vague form of self-expression; and it might thus help to sweep his head clear of some of the nonsense, now so current, about art as inspiration, as the visitation of angels and nervous fits, as pure impulse, cosmic creation, or divinely abysmal egotism. It could make him concerned not so much with showing himself off as with studying to see what he is and what he has got by way of histrionic endowments and perceptions. If he had to represent the voice of, for example, an old beggar, he could listen better to his own voice and take it not so much as the voice that is his but as an instrument of his stage art. He might in sum learn to study himself as stage material or medium. By supplying so concretely a problem to be converted into theatre terms, character work might help him better to understand what the relation of the art of acting is to the individual, might make easier for him the technical security of attack that he needs, and the

technical continuity or sustained projection. This would make the design of all his rôles more solid and defined, even when he is not playing character parts at all. And such a solidity of design would tend to uphold him from performance to performance and make him less dangerously dependent on his self and his mood and less unequal and hit-and-miss.

Character work cultivates the sense of imitation, the duplication of external details, a certain distinct articulation and mimicry. This mimicry is the healthful and sound basis of the actor's art, as the gift for seeing accurately the visible world about him is of the painter's. It is related to the actor's art as a musical ear is to the musician's. It is the natural foundation of acting born in him, as pitch and harmony are a part of the musical endowment, and a sure sign of the talent that makes him a born actor though he may never be an artist. Mimicry is despised in acting these days as memory is despised in education. Actors who mimic well in low parts may be beloved, but even in such cases most people prefer the exploitation of the actor's comic personality to any reproduction, however good, of some

character different from him. Even when the actor's style is presentational, which is to say even when he presents the idea rather than reproduces the likeness of what he creates, the same thing holds; in his very elimination of likeness and exact imitation, he can work better for being able to reproduce what he wills, as even the most abstract of painters profits by commanding the exact forms which his eyes see in the world about him and which he avoids or restates, according to his desire and intention.

Every one who thinks of the matter at all agrees that acting with us is not very prosperous as an art. A play that calls more or less for a simple, individualistic identification of the actor with some part that he can easily think of as himself has a fair chance, plays like *The First Year*, *Rain*, *The Poor Nut*, for example, or *What Price Glory*. But any play that demands a sustained technical security or that presents some elevation in quality or some peculiar style or mood, stands every chance of failure because there are no actors to present it. Any play apart from the common life is almost impossible to cast well and, if it is pro-

duced, is too often misjudged by the public because what it has in it gets no chance of expression. If you are interested in the theatre you turn, then, naturally, to our younger players, and consider what means there are by which their improvement may be furthered. They can study for movement, for voice, diction, they can develop an understanding of their material and illuminate the nature of their own art by culture in other arts, music, poetry, architecture. Experience with audiences or seasons of playing will give them much. But even for those players whose audiences may like them straight and could not endure their efforts in "characters," work in character acting is a highly profitable school in which they may perfect themselves.

Take Miss Helen Gahagan, for instance, a young lady picked up without any study to speak of, because of her beauty and intelligence and fine intentions, and cast with a full-fledged rôle, and in that rôle so highly praised by her reviewers and so agreeable to her audiences that ever since she has been unable to step down into the shorter and less ambitious rôles where she could acquire the mere business of her craft.

She is played up for herself in every part, always herself. If Miss Gahagan had to play a "character," a bright-voiced, quick-talking little eccentric in a comedy, to take an easy illustration, she could learn more about her own voice, its use and range. Or what if she played a stately old woman, a beggar, or a dancer all flowing rhythm, or some melodramatic, wicked creature whose effects depend entirely on intensity and violence? She might never suit such parts, might do them badly, might return to parts such as we have seen her in; but she would be blessed with much more knowledge of her own means and the nature of her task.

Or we may take Miss Winifred Lenihan, who, by virtue of her unusual mask, her serious nature, intensity and feeling, her self-confidence and hard labor, has achieved a considerable following and some good moments in several performances. There are many kinds of character parts that would help Miss Lenihan; the part that might be of most use toward her growth as an artist would be one in which some distinct and yet not very appealing type had to catch and hold the attention of the audience,

without an intense or emotional moment to carry her along, without any opening for the appeal of tears or numb suffering, but with the need always of an engaging voice, of impersonal craft, such as speed, cues, high spirits, and a lively give and take with the players around her, a part in sum that would best give her less use of her more personal qualities and more exercise in sheer acting.

Mr. Louis Calhern, of *Cobra* and *Roger Bloomer*, is a young actor who has held his place for several seasons in parts where he is the comely, well-dressed young man. This he succeeds in being. But he is not an actor at all, not yet. He would benefit by a good ugly make-up and sordid clothes, he needs to do a tramp or so, an old man, anything where he could see that what you need to do is to act something instead of merely being it.

Mr. Walter Abel, with a poignant and sensitive temperament and a suggestive mask, needs experience in parts that will break up his stolid gesture and his constant subjective mood that now lacks the right physical and vocal rhythm to give it body. A hard and shallow villain to play would do him good, or an aged drunkard,

a clown, a harlequin, parts with less mood and more theatrical craft, more objective approach, more sheer imitation. This clown part, indeed, would make a useful exercise for most players, especially if they had to cope with good, reliable, honest-to-God tricks, expert movement, mimicry, time sense and a feel for the audience, and could not for a moment turn the clown, as they are apt to do, into the usual moony Pierrot of their poetic egotisms.

That such players would or would not be willing to step from their direct personal appeal and essay these character parts, or would be bad or good in them, or would not be given the chance by managers, does not affect the point, which is that experience in "character" could teach them much about acting and about themselves.

And finally a certain experience in character acting could go far toward cultivating the sense of wit or poetry in a player. The usual wit that we associate with the actor's performance is a matter of points, of stresses and amusing situations supplied by the dramatist and exploited for what they are worth by the actor. At their best they are witticisms partaking of

the nature of jokes or, at their worst, of gags. But the fullest and highest form of wit does not rely so much on special moments, and is not exhibited so much in the exploitation of points as in a general conception that pervades a whole performance, something that is like a bath of light by which the performance is surrounded and from which it achieves a lively radiation. Within this whole there is a constant succession of points, a constant reference from the parts to the whole, a delightful succession of perceptions evinced by the actor, a witty comment, detail for detail, on the character that he is creating. What makes a performance of Miss Laura Hope Crews so delightful even in a part that is not character, or Mr. George Arliss so delightful as the Duke of St. Olpherts, is our perpetual sense of the play of the artist's mind on detail and the witty relation of this detail to life. For wit is a matter of perception, of swift similarities; and character acting, with its observation and records of traits and human details and its happy conveyance of such an observation, supplies the witty chance. And for such ends technique itself becomes a kind of wit.

1. Joseph Jefferson in *Rip Van Winkle* was a character actor, as was David Warfield in *The Music Master*. In *Rosmersholm* Mrs. Fiske acted a straight part, as did Mr. Walter Hampden in Clyde Fitch's play *The City*. What, after all, is the greatness of their several performances measured by?

2. What contribution do you think the character mask in which Mr. Charles Chaplin works may make toward his complete expression of what he wishes to convey?

3. In the case of a fantastic character like the Charlie of the Charles Chaplin films, and a realistic character like the Disraeli of Mr. George Arliss, which result has more poetry, which more witty prose? Compare each to Congreve, to Shakespeare, in quality.

4. There are actors like Miss Jane Cowl, Mr. Morgan Farley, Mr. Grant Mitchell, and many leading men and women whom you admire in straight parts but would not indorse for character, and, on the other hand, many admirable character actors like Mr. Otis Skinner, whom you would not expect to see in straight parts. In each case what traits are there which lead you to such a conclusion?

5. What are some of the great character parts in the tradition of our English theatre, such, for example, as Bob Acres? What are the elements that contribute to their immortality? In this connection discuss in such character parts the relation of the individual to the general, the person to the type, and vice versa.

6. Which of the following would you class as character parts, which straight parts?

Sir Toby Belch, Mrs. Malaprop, Célimène, Antigone, Alceste, Candida, Sir Anthony Absolute,

Oswald Alving, Dr. Brack, Paula Tanqueray, Ægisthus, the son in Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, Yeats' Deidre, Lady Gregory's Hyacinth Halvey, John Synge's Playboy, the heroine in Clyde Fitch's *The Climbers*, *The Girl with the Green Eyes*, *Captain Finks of the Horse Marines*, La Cavallini in Edward Sheldon's *Romance*, Falstaff, Portia, John Gabriel Borkman, Orlando, Rosalind, Lydia Languish, Anna Christie in Eugene O'Neill's play of that name, the Count of Monte Cristo, Medea.

V

WEARING COSTUMES

IF the ability to see the point appears anywhere in the theatre, it appears in the wearing of a costume. A costume ideally designed and ideally worn is a visual description of what the speeches and movements express in words and actions. And seeing the point with regard to the costume will consist of first discerning its characteristic quality and then knowing how to translate this quality into the actor's own body, by which the costume is carried and through which it is animated, through which it comes to life and is itself, or else remains thwarted and is dead.

Costumes become the art of the theatre when clothes are translated into something which they were not before, and have added to them something that was not there before. This something added derives from the play, from the scene, the lights, the dramatic mood and idea, the whole theatrical occasion of which the costumes make a part. A costume when it has become the art of the theatre is not a mere du-

plicate, it has the same relation to the original garment that a costume in a portrait of Velasquez has when it becomes the art of painting. To the original clothes Velasquez has added something that was not there before, and they have become painting. And if a designer with an historical costume to do takes it from a Velasquez canvas, he does not slavishly reproduce it; he does with that painted costume what the painter did with the original clothes, he translates it into theatrical terms exactly as Velasquez translated them into painting terms.

Costumes that have been created in terms of the art of the theatre are either those designed to interpret and create a dramatic mood or those that add to this intention the element also of period or epoch or locality. In one case there is a mood to be expressed. It may be radiance, realistic exactitude or rapture, or mystery or magnificence or romance, or any of the infinite moods that the theatre can present. Beginning with actuality, I mean with clothes as they exist for any observer, the artist-designer does what the artist in every case must do, which is to establish and create the relation of his own inner world to the world



The modern movement in costume design was heralded by Bakst's brilliant designs for the Russian Ballet. Note the bold and dramatic use of the classical motives in this costume for a nymph in "L'Après-Midi d'un Faune."



Coquelin has here a double problem in wearing the costume. As Mascarille in Molière's "Les Precieuses Ridicules," he is dressed in the clothes of a gallant of the seventeenth century, but as they would be when worn by a blustering valet.

outside of him. That is to say, he uses the literal costume with which he begins as the means through which he can express what he has to say. He will extend a line here or heighten a quality there; he will intensify a tone, he will eliminate and underscore, he will do whatever is necessary to force the costume to say the dramatic thing that is necessary to the moment. Sometimes for his designing he is entirely free. He has no clothes that he must follow or resemble, he can use fabric, color, and line purely in themselves to express what he likes. His final problem, however, is the same as it is when he uses actual and recognizable clothes for a starting-point: his final problem is the expression of an idea in stage garments.

The designer when he comes to period costumes has to deal with an actuality that is in all cases whatsoever already established. That is to say, he deals with costumes that are already expressive; the quality of an epoch adds another element to the problem of the dramatic mood, and is to be converted into that mood.

A costume truly expressive of its epoch catches exactly the characteristic quality from the civilization out of which it arises, the social

ideas, canons of taste, the point of view with regard to life and art. The Spain of Philip the Fourth finds its provincialism and remoteness from the rest of Europe, its magnificence and courtly suavity, its power and wealth and self-assurance and elegance, expressed in those costumes that we see in Velasquez' pictures. The periwig that we see at the court of France and spreading from there throughout the fashions of Europe never got to Spain at all, the natural hair worn long persisted—together with the stiff-starched collar—for two generations after the rest of the world had abandoned it. The fanaticism and pride, the wealth and decorum and austere magnificence show in the fabric and in the cut and design of the gowns of those Infantas and the court suits of Velasquez' admirals and kings and princes. The costumes of Ghirlandaio have all the severity and distinction of the Florence of his day; the figures of Lisa Tornabuoni and those ladies and cavaliers and scholars with her in the chapel frescoes of Santa Maria Novella stand firmly without being dull; they are alive and stiff at the same time, they are angular and elegant, decorous and intense at the same moment. They

have a grand austere thinness and a kind of poignant chic. The textiles they employ are severe and rich, intricate and strangely puritanical, and the design and flow of the lines and masses of their garments is both harsh and wistful. In the costumes of the Byzantium of later Greek days, the moody splendor of the East, the decaying exoticism of Hellenic civilization, the eclectic culture, the relaxation and excess of the barbaric, all appear. These qualities in historic costumes—or in costumes from foreign lands whose separation from us in space amounts to one in time—the designer recreates in the terms of the art of the theatre. The actor wearing the costumes has for his necessity the problem of how he shall bring to them their characteristic quality, and, in so far as he is an artist in this one respect of wearing costumes, how he can recreate them in terms of himself and express himself in terms of them, adding even to the costume, as the designer-artist has created it, something that up to the moment when the actor-artist puts it on had not been there.

I remember once watching the performance of a young actress in the part of Mrs. Candor

in *The School for Scandal*. At one moment in the play when she was about to leave the drawing-room, she linked arms with two of the gentlemen and left the room hanging on them, laughing merrily and archly. What the player should have had, in order to fill and carry this costume of hers, what lustre of voice and movement, was everywhere about her to be learned. She should have known from the powder in her hair if from nothing else, or from the height of her heels, or the flounces and hoops of her costume, that such a manner as she displayed was not possible. She might have known this from the very furniture of the room itself. That chair of the late eighteenth century sits lightly on its legs, and shows an exquisite damask in its covering, but it sits nevertheless secure, its design is poised and secure, its utility certain. It has an elaborate and chaste finish, a highly veneered and highly civilized frailty, and polish and reserve. That fan on the table, "chicken skin, delicate" as the Pompadour's which hides nothing and hides all; the clear, suave panels of the wall; to these too, as well as the chair, she might have gone to school, just as she might have got the proper manner from the study of

her lines, from the very style of the writing itself, whose high finish, whose artifice, whose suave design and whose removal from the direct prose of every day, show no relation to a society of guffaw and rollicking about. To walk so in such a gown meant that this young actress did not wear her eighteenth-century costume at all. She had no idea what her clothes expressed, and walked in them, just as they, in their turn, hung on her, without connection and without point.

If an actor in a Sophoclean tragedy is given a costume and wants to learn to wear it, he can study the nature of the period and the essential quality that underlies Sophocles' conceptions. Character, events, emotional reactions are here seen in large and typical outlines, universal and stately, and are never particularized into individual detail or realistic and subjective minutiae. The reading of the verse exhibits the stately and simplified scale of recitation suited to such a drama. The movements of the actor's body, of his hands and arms and head, his stride and his carriage, have the general and nobly chosen and simplified style that the whole conception of the play requires.

Having discerned these qualities in the play and achieved them in the acting, the actor must recognize that they are inherent in the costumes as well, and are to be carried into the wearing of them. Let him think of the Greek marbles, of that land with its sure, final outlines. Let him think of the music that the Athenian playgoer heard as he watched those garments moving under that clear light and with the sea-wind blowing on them; a music of harmonious lines, the voice of the flute, of pipes single and pure above the murmurings and more solid texture of strings. He must keep clear like that the lines of his costume, lines flowing singly or in complex rhythms upon the mass of it. A quick movement or a nervous carriage, a sudden and individual impetuosity of gesture, deny the very character of the costume and through that begin the loss of the dramatic effect.

If you take a Venetian brooch from the time of Veronese, with its mixture of jewels, its enamels, its complex design and elaborate finish, it will seem perhaps elaborate to excess. But if you put it on a piece of brocade of the same period, with its rich design and complex

detail, the brooch will seem perfect and right. If an actor in an Elizabethan costume, with its numberless details, its rich stuff, its gems, gold lace and complex and ornate design, will fill it with its characteristic quality rather than try to evade or soften this quality, he will find that certain highly Elizabethan speeches, ornate, rich, complex to the utmost, will take their place more easily and achieve their right scale of beauty. In such cases the costume is a kind of décor that can give to speeches their right placement and scale.

The wearing of a costume may be either witty or poetic. If an actor's costumes are an Eastern Magi's, flowing and rich, or a common hobo's or a dandy's of our day, he may put into the wearing of each the full of inspiration, may enlarge their scope, creating an image, beyond them even, of radiant significance, as the poet does with an experience. In that robe this Magi may so move that it says "this is the line of my soul, this wide shadow is my mystery, this trailing flow is my dignity and prophetic progress and quietness." The muted and thwarted soul, or careless nights under hedges, or bitterness or droll gallantries, what-

ever impulse toward life the poet wills, may be created in the hobo clothes; and in the dandy costume ironical poignancy or cursed triviality. Or the wearing of costumes may be a shine or crackle of comment on them and on the characters they clothe. Through this witty carriage of costumes, epigrams become a part of their texture. Mirabell's shoes may be worn so that the very heels speak. They are the heels of their day of fashion, but the actor's standing in them and reflecting upon them delights us with its comment on these heels, just as his swish of the wide-skirted coat is both this modish eighteenth-century garment and a dash of observation upon it. If we saw an actress in the costume of Mistress Millamant, with its full skirts and its close bodice, its damask and aristocratic flare, we should know how much she senses the smart sweetness and perfection of Millamant, who is the poetry of wit, by her first movement on the stage, by how much she has of "that brave vibration each way free" and "how sweetly flows the liquefaction of her clothes."

The same poetic imagination or witty comment may be achieved by playing against the costumes, by wearing them as contrasts through

which a reverse idea is expressed, sodden clothes on a regal character, for example, grand modes on comic housemaids, girlish frocks on somewhat elderly exponents. This is only another way of wearing costumes, keeping them alive. Behind its effect the same principle works as in the familiar theme of Pierrot, for example, the wistful heart beneath the clowning mask; or in Falstaff, the frisking animation set absurdly against his bulk, and the grandiose and fraudulent pretense set against this absurdity; or in Hauptmann's Hannele, the radiant vision and exaltation within those sordid rags.

Just as the actor's being fills his body, which in turn expresses it, so the actor, himself, body and being, fills his costume, which expresses him or what, during the time he has it on, he must be. This that he must be while he has on the costume derives from his translation of it into his own mood; from this translation derives the idea that the costume provides a body for, and through the idea within it this costume-body is alive.

"It is easy," Kingsley's good fairy says to the child, "to make a thing; the great feat is to make a thing make itself."

1. What do you know of the costumes worn in the comedy of Molière, in English comedy about 1775, in the comedy of Plautus?

2. In the Greek theatre what differences were there in the problems presented to the wearer of a comic costume from those of the tragic actor?

3. Point out the relationship between a declamatory or formal delivery of the actor's lines, on the one hand, and, on the other, such costumes as he would wear in Racine's tragedies or in the rôles of Sophocles.

4. Point out the distinguishing characteristics of the male costume of the Elizabethan epoch, George IV, Louis XV, the First Empire. What effect would you get if you dressed Macbeth in the style of Louis XIV, Juliet in early Victorian, Mrs. Alving in Elizabethan, Hamlet in modern dress? Each of these instances is full of exact and very suggestive points.

5. Is it more important that the costume be worn well in poetic comedy like *Twelfth Night*, or comedy of manners like *The Way of the World*? Why?

VI

SEEING THE POINT

ONE of the commonest ideas about God is that no man could bear to look upon His face. The radiance there would be too great for mortal eyes. In an odd way the same is true of man with regard to all his experience—with objects, say, or actions or thought. He does not see the central light of experience, the essential quality that characterizes it and distinguishes it from everything else. He prefers instinctively to flee the point, to blur it over, to evade it, losing himself in a looser, easier, more elusive generality. The quality that he would willingly see in a piece of experience is a quality that may be called *a kind of a sort of a something*. And at the same time, by a yet deeper instinct, he is pursued by the essential, as he is by the idea of God; there is something in him deep down that waits for the fundamental characteristic to appear to him, to take him, to reveal the experience to him.

In art the average man is neither a poet nor a scientist; his perceptions are neither deeply

poetic nor precisely realistic. He chooses a middle course which evades the point all round, giving him a little of every side without the inmost sting and shock of any. He evades the sharp comedy of things and he shrinks from their tragedy; he chooses the sentimental course, which softens, footlights and vaporizes a little whatever it touches. With the experience portrayed he is too much at home to weep to the last tragic bounds and too far from home to laugh to the depths of humor. And yet at the same time it is true, for example, that the plays that hold him finally and that survive the whims of mere seasons and single generations are those that discover in their matter a great central pattern of idea and significance, and translate this idea into all the dramatic elements involved. The power of the artist and the completeness of his performance achieve a concentration and creative life that compel men to follow and to make a great work of art a part of themselves. Meantime, however, it is true, as Plato said, that most men are blind to the fact of their ignorance of the essential character of each individual thing. They do not see in each thing that which distinguishes it from every other;

they do not see what, if the thing were freed from all but its own characteristic, would remain, and would be the point of it, and would define its existence in the midst of a multitude of things like and unlike. What men are least apt to do is to see the point.

Every man has some ability and gift toward seeing the essential quality of what he experiences. He may easily see that the characteristic of a circle is a series of points equidistant from one point. The essence of a straight line is that it is the shortest distance between any two points within it. And from such as these he passes to more difficult pieces of experience, and to the discovery of what shall be for him the essential quality of the wind at night, say, or the poetry of Shelley or Leopardi, the art of Duccio or Botticelli, the character of a great city, of heroic figures in time, or cycles of thought.

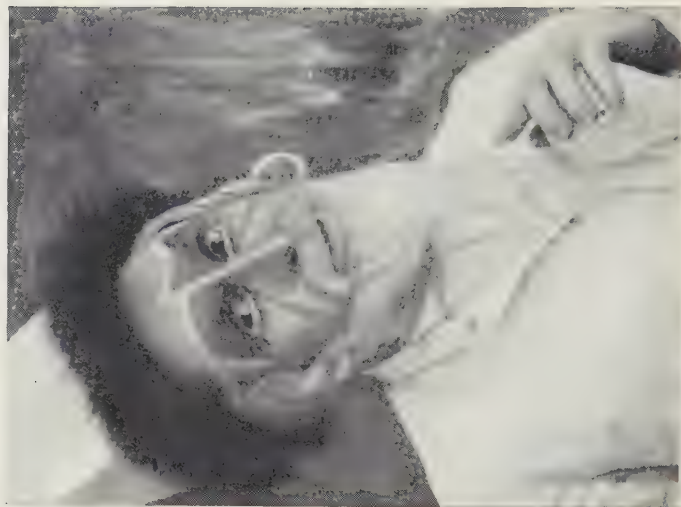
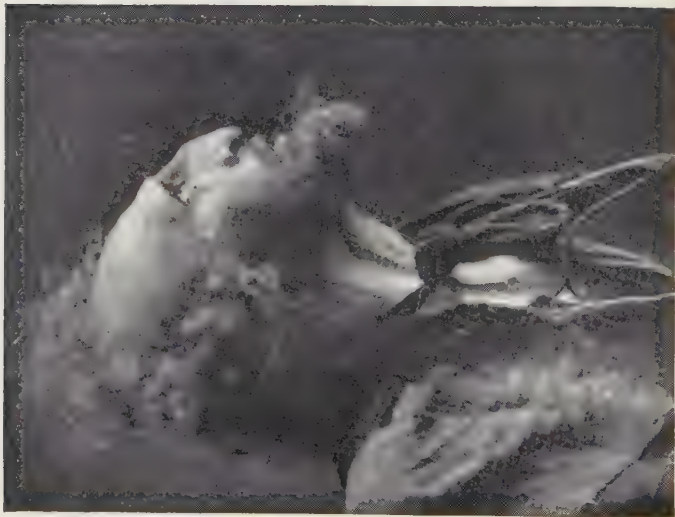
An artist, however, is, by his very nature, distinguished from most men by the force that drives him toward an essential characteristic. The extent of this force is one of the measures of the artist in him. He approaches his material—the sculptor his living model or anatomy, the

painter his landscape, the dramatist his men and events—and finds in it something that is his idea; he means to discover that element which for him will be the conscious being; he finds in his material that something; he finds that which will be for him permanent and ideal, and will remain for him when the material itself has faded. Out of his own substance the artist evolves forms, ideas, as out of the growing substance of a forest the tree form evolves, and then in turn the forest form from the trees, taken together among themselves. He is driven on to creation by his desire to free his idea from the confusions and accidents of the original material and to leave it essential.

The next measure of the artist's ability, however, will be the extent to which he can carry into the terms of his art the essential that he desires to express. Any one, almost, knows how easy it is at the start to get the outside. An artist often comes early on an external and accidental semblance of what he is attempting to create. With a little talent and less instruction or practice one may paint a pleasing landscape, trees, golden sky, birds flying, or make a pretty drawing. In music a beginner with a good ear



In the remarkable German film, "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari," the style of production was the more readily seen because of the whole production being cast in German, all the best—the decor, the directing, the acting—all was seen as if it were the actual world of a madman.



*Nahum Zemach at the Ilabimah in Moscow.
Two make-ups for the Wandering Jew, one realistic, one stylized.*

and relaxed fingers can set up a remarkable effect. And a young sculptor can catch the outside of a head, find a nose and eyes and surface planes that make a highly plausible result. But only slowly does the young painter find his essential idea and the technique inevitable to it; only slowly the musician discovers the unescapable pattern of the musical form; and the young sculptor begins to be promising when he is unwilling to go farther than the point where he can actually carry into sculpturesque terms, into mass and line, into solidity of form, the head that he attempts. In the art of the theatre the nearness of the means—the actor, scene, and incident—to the material—men, places, and events—makes easily possible a certain semblance of an art. But to achieve theatricality, to discover in the material some fundamental point and at the same time to express that in the peculiar terms of the art involved, is far from easy.

The separate and individual nature of each art, and of any school or period in art, best appears through the essential idea or quality expressed in any piece of it. All arts have at bottom the same function and the same prin-

ciples. But a like essential idea may be variously expressed in terms of the various parts of living, in mass and form, for example, or in color and line, or in words, or in an art that consists, as the theatre does, of light, words, places, and the movements, the voice, the bodies and presences, of human beings. The perception in a painting and in a statue, for instance, of such a like essential idea will make clear the difference between the expression of it pictorially or sculpturally, and so will in turn make clear what is essentially sculpture and what painting. It might make clear, also, how far or near to some particular experience that had been re-created in them all, the several arts may be, how available each one is for expressing the experience.

A company of artists are gathered together, shall we say, looking out over the sunset desert around the columns of Luxor. In the end the same necessity would hold for each of them, which would be to express some essential characteristic in the experience. Obviously the artist whose medium would most immediately convey the literal experience of the scene would be the painter's. He, at his peril, may set down

as much or as little of the actual scene as he chooses. The sculptor would have to remove the essential idea into some less representative or photographic form; what he derived from this experience might appear in the sheer relation of abstract lines and mass. The architect might give to the lines and spaces of a façade an essence which, in the art of words, a poet might call the serenity and austere infinity of that hour and scene. And the musician, dreaming of that desert space stretching forever away from the lines of those columns in stone, might express in the unknowable depths and forces of music a kind of inmost vitality in him at that moment. Meanwhile beneath all these several pieces of art there might be one essential characteristic of the experience in that time and place; and through the perception of this in its several embodiments in the various arts the essential nature of each art might be distinguished.

In the matter of the distinguishing characteristics of the several periods and schools in any one art, the same holds true. A like essential is expressed at various periods and in various schools. The expression of the idea of

saintliness, for example, or of exaltation or elegance might appear in Romanesque, Gothic, or Palladian architecture, and in Italian, Austrian, or Spanish baroque. The theme of love appears in Horace, Dante, Mallarmé and their followers. The relation of individual impulse to the general order and decorum is involved in Shakespeare, Racine, Ibsen, or Morselli. From the perception of the essential expressed so variously, the various natures of the several periods or schools may be more clearly manifest.

In all arts the elements of beauty, style, and purity have at bottom a pressing relation to the perception of the essential quality.

In any experience beauty as a pleasurable attribute appears when we perceive the characteristic quality and at the same time recognize that in the experience this quality attains to a certain unity and completeness. This is what Saint Augustine meant when he said that all beauty consisted in unity—*omnis quippe pulchritudinis forma unitas est*. In a work of art all beauty derives from unity in its essential character; and however great a variety of qualities may be exercised within this unity, every quality is made to relate itself to this essential.

All style in art begins with essential idea. When a painter says that another painter has style, or when we say that Mounet-Sully had style, we use the word in a somewhat special sense. Style in that sense means a certain heightening, a certain added elaboration, something that can be isolated from the content of the work of art though it is not false to it. Style in that sense is not necessarily the soul of the thing so much as it is the lustre of the artist. But style in any large and general sense comes back to Buffon's remark that the style was the man, or to Spenser's "soul is form and doth the body make." Style is the medium by which the idea finds expression. Style is what appears between the content of a work of art and its appearance in a form. Style is what arrives at that precise point at which the work of art comes into existence. Before this point at which it achieves its style, the work of art does not exist. In a work of art the artist has a certain underlying essential idea or characteristic in the treatment of his material, a certain point, which he sees as the soul of it. This point he puts through every part of it. Complete style arrives in a work of art only when

the idea is translated into the terms of every part.

The difference between an artist and a man who has intentions but cannot create them into art, appears in the absence of the style that might accomplish this translation of idea into form. Minor artists and imitators, apart from the significance of such ideas as they possess, are what they are because they are able to put the essential characteristic not through all the parts of a work, but only in this part or that. Mr. Paul Manship, beautiful and learned as his work may often be, has a statue of a girl with fauns that we may take as an example of such incompleteness. The turn of the girl's head, the lines and folds of her garment are in the manner of the early Greek marbles; the fauns, in the management of the ears, the nostrils, the little chasings to indicate the hair above the tail, the hoofs and the eyes, remind us of that lovely pair from Herculaneum, pseudo-archaic, exotic, charming past all words. But the girl's hands and her ankles and feet are almost modern in their character; in those two details the idea that characterized the rest of the work has not found expression, and they

are therefore dead, and, in fact, never lived; they are apart from the rest of the statue.

Artists that are almost wholly eclectic and not very original get the form without the content. They learn from other instances of their art and from masters of it a manner of working; they take on bodies for which they have no fulfilling souls to contribute. They take over a style which says something not their own and is almost free of them. A highly eclectic sculptor, for example, may get the surface, the external manner, the character that he has derived from another, but he cannot get the essential sculptural solidity which derives from the true relation of the modelled mass to its idea. And it may happen in all arts, also, that a style gets fixed, outstays its meaning; the form remains, but half the fundamental idea beneath it is lost; as at the Théâtre Français, for one illustration, where much of the tradition is, at the hands of bad actors, lacking in idea; or as in some of Michelangelo's followers, who got only his mannerisms without the ideal necessity behind them.

No style at all, then, to repeat, can arrive until the artist gets the point, the character-

istic. The completeness of the style—and of the work of art—depends on the extent to which this characteristic extends through every part. An actor creating Œdipus can learn from the play itself the character of every detail confronting him. He can discern, for instance, that his make-up requires a beard, and the obligation for a beard will serve to comment on his whole problem. That he must wear a beard the actor knows not so much from tradition as from every separate aspect of the drama. To begin with, the very story itself is not personal with Sophocles but was a racial myth ready to his hand. This story—and the final form of it that he uses in his play—consists mostly of outline, a large, general pattern in which the shadings of incident, character, and emotional and ideal reaction are included. The characters themselves are, first of all, types, large forms, and afterward more or less individuals. The emotions and ideas are not so much personal as typical, powerful visitations within these human vessels of forces larger and more lasting than they, passing through them, shaking and revealing and leaving them. The images created, the diction employed in the

play, are kept within the bounds of a certain size and a certain pattern of simplicity. From all this the actor learns, then, at the very start that his own features will too greatly individualize the rôle; just as in turn he knows, in so far as he is an artist, that the reactions he expresses, and the gestures he employs must have about them a certain outline quality, a pattern of universality; and just as in turn he knows that in his recitation he must strive for line forms rather than words and phrases, and so must move toward a sonorous and impersonal and formal manner of delivery. Sophocles as a dramatic artist succeeds and attains greatness by reason of the fact that the characteristic quality is carried greatly and completely through every part of his drama, the story, the ethical theme, the characters, the reactions, the imagery, diction, the verse. His play possesses an absolute totality in style.

The defect of Euripides, on the other hand, great poet and dramatist that he is, consists, in so far at least as the Greek dramatic form is concerned, in his not being able to create or to introduce a style that could express his quality amply or completely; Euripides leaves no little

of his thought and content undramatized, uncreated, and conveys it to us as more or less separable moments of literature or philosophy; it is as if Velasquez in his *Surrender of Breda*, instead of carrying into his very brush and into the outlines of his forms the quality that in the art of words we should speak of as gracious and most suave, had attached written words to the canvas to express further the idea in his mind.

In many a production of *The Merchant of Venice*, the casket scene has had a mass of gilding and tricking out, with every sort of detail, cushions, canopies, throne-chairs and costumes, coming and going, everything but the point; which visually is the relation of the caskets to the suitors, to Portia and to the whole scene; which orally is the poetic rhythm and imagery; which in sum is the pattern of idea, picture and sound that underlies the scene. In the Hopkins-Jones-Barrymore production of *Hamlet*, on the contrary, the scene where Hamlet comes upon the king at prayer was acted with the king on his knees near the front of the stage, his hands lifted to heaven. Behind him stood Hamlet with his drawn sword

in his hand. The two figures, one behind the other, the lifted hands, the sword pointing, expressed for the eye the exact pattern of the scene's idea, the precise theme of relationships. Visually, at least, the essential of that scene had been achieved, and had been freed of every characteristic not its own.

An actor, therefore, is an artist only in so far as he can first see the point or characteristic quality and then put this through every detail of his performance. His manner, his gestures, his walk, his diction, and quality of mind will differ in *The School for Scandal* from what they must be in Ibsen's *Ghosts*; in Regnard's play of *le Légataire Universel* he will eat grapes, make love, wear his clothes or fight a duel in a style that differs from his necessary style in Beaumont and Fletcher as Regnard's precision and swift cold elegance differ from the gallantries and lyrical whimsies of the two Elizabethans. And it is through this principle that the actor will know how to approach the question of naturalness in acting, and to dispose of the usual nonsense on the subject. He will know that in acting, as in any other art, the only naturalness involved—and the only mean-

ing that the word could have—arises from the essential nature of the work of art which he has in hand.

All purity in art begins with the translation of the essential idea. A work of art is pure in so far as it compels the ideas within it to stick to its own terms; it is pure in so far as the ideas within it find expression solely in these terms, without relying on anything else. In a work of art that is pure the idea—and every manifestation of it—discovers a body that is free of all characteristics not those of the art employed. A painting of a majestic scene or of some heroic and austere vista is not a painting at all—however stirring it may be as a visual memory or as poetry—unless this characteristic that, in the art of words, we call magnificent austerity exists in the color, the line, the brush, the composition of the picture. And so with music and every art. And that purity which we discern in the great artists' natures—and to a lovable extent in most minor artists, too—and in great saints, arises from this; what they dream and desire is for its own end and perfection, free of considerations outside itself and untouched by the intrusions of another

world of aims. For them the idea or dream can alone be important; and by the side of it they are not even aware of "all other idle and unreal shapes attendant on mortality."

Criticism of art that is a matter of personal preference and individual taste and private responses is not without value, however variable these may be. But the aspect of criticism that is most constructive, useful, and not to be debated, is that which arises first from the critic's ability to perceive the characteristic quality underlying a work of art. He abstracts this characteristic from whatever embodiments of it may be apparent; he carries it to some ideal completion, and then judges the work of art by this ideal, by the extent to which this complete realization of its idea is achieved. Where the critic can do this he transcends individual accidents of mere choice. And no small part of his cultivation will derive from his training in the perception of and the acquaintance with many characteristic qualities.

And, finally, in every man the delight and happy nurture of all art—as of all other experience—will depend at length on his seeing the point, on his discovery of the last necessary

characteristic. With the growth and cultivation of this faculty he will go learning to see the point of what he considers and exercises himself upon, taking a kind of delight in finding what seems for him to be the soul of the thing observed. From the body of it the essential idea emerges like a soul; from the circle its circularity and its perfect cessation within itself; from the moonlit plain what in language he calls its stillness and infinite peace, the dream of it that there are no words to describe; from the rose its roseness, by which it lingers in the memory; from Mozart his quality, and from El Greco his; and from the poet of the *Eclogues*, the *Georgics*, and some of the *Æneid*, that character of poignant and lyrical reflection and ornate quietness that we call Virgilian. These essential qualities of things emerging out of them take on a permanence in the man's life that seems to survive them, and to achieve a kind of constancy; and so, out of the flux of all things, to offer to us something immortal in mortality.

Through this development in a man it may come to be that his pleasure in a work of art does not depend so much on the discovery of



The background for these figures in "Sooner or Later," at the Neighborhood Playhouse is projected by the Color Organ.



The use of light, its color, its forms, intensity, and revelation is in itself a language in the art of the theatre. Thomas Wilfred's Color Organ is an instrument that projects on the screen designs of color forms and intensities which have their own emotional significance, a kind of visual music that does not reproduce or imitate the objects and sights that we see around us but is abstract and complete in itself as music is, which consists of sounds that do not imitate or reproduce anything but are expressive in themselves.

superlative instances and hot enthusiasms often soon past. It relieves him of the sense that he must acclaim the work of art as the best in the world or the best he has ever seen; and allows him the pleasure, always possible, even in an inferior thing, of discerning what the essential quality within it is and the extent to which this quality has been expressed. And in his own mind at least, if not always in the work of art, these essential ideas may dilate themselves toward perfection. This will add to that development and perfecting within himself of conceptions, qualities, essential ideas, by which not only he understands art but he lives as well. From them he gets light for his own experience, and out of his experience he adds elements to the sum of them. Art becomes—as the rest of life is—the field for his immortal search and continuity. And through this, art can reveal those in whom life is a passion of oneness and duration; and can, as Plato said of a certain music, from the divinity of its nature make evident those who are in want of the god. In great art a man seeks even more than in his own flesh a body for that which he most wishes to preserve in himself.

1. It is stupid when dealing with a work of art to bring in a matter of belief and disbelief. Up to a certain point your problem with a work of art is rather one of understanding what the artist means to express, and the success with which he achieves the expression of it. It is only after this point that your belief or indorsement of the work of art can properly begin.

In the case of George Kaiser's *From Morn Till Midnight*, or of John Howard Lawson's *Processional*, both plays of the Expressionistic School of modern drama, the dramatist, like every other dramatist, takes his material, which is a section of human life, and employs his method in order to express some particular element in it. What in each of these cases does the dramatist express?

Is what the two plays express as significant to you as what is expressed in Rostand's work? On what grounds do you call it more or less significant?

2. It is possible to compare Molière's and Shakespeare's comedies only with regard to the range and significance of their expression of human experience. To compare *Les Femmes Savantes* with *As You Like It* as comedies is almost as profitless as comparing houses with gardens. What of comparing Racine with Euripides? Sheridan with Congreve?

3. What conception of love do you find in Shakespeare, in Æschylus, in Molière, in Ibsen? How does this determine the form and treatment of the love-scenes in *Romeo and Juliet*, *Agamemnon*, *L'Amour Dépit*, *Rosmersholm*?

VII

THE ART OF DIRECTING

EXTREME TYPES

IN the course of stage history the director has borne a varied name and a more varied relationship to the theatre. He has sometimes been the owner of the play, sometimes an actor from the company, sometimes the *régisseur*, or director of the entire production in all its parts, sometimes the producer or actor-manager. But whatever the problem of the *régisseur*, or producer, or actor-manager may be elsewhere, in our American theatre at present the director is the man with the script in his hand who stands behind the whole performance of the play, who, to varying degrees, prescribes what the interpretation shall be, what the actors shall do, and trains them how to do it. He is the *maestro*, the coach, the general behind the rehearsals.

The director is the artist who takes the drama as it is put into his hands and labors to recreate it in his own technical terms. And this

drama, when it is re-created into these terms, becomes theatre and something that is different from what it was before. Directing is an art or it is nothing.

There is no such thing as a play directed exactly as it is written any more than there is a landscape painted as it really is. In any art the material that goes to make up the work suffers a change before it becomes this work, and this change, this something added, derives from the artist working. In Corot's *Ville d'Avray* the material was the landscape of trees, atmosphere, and light; the medium was the paint. In Houdon's *Voltaire* the material was a body and the character in that body; the medium the marble. The dramatist's material is men, life, experience; his medium the dramatic form. In the art of the director the drama itself is the material, and the actor in the midst of the audience and the designer's décor is his medium. It follows that when a drama emerges from the hands of the director it has undergone a restatement of itself, a translation into the terms of the theatre, and the importance of the thing added will measure the importance of the director.

Most directors are not distinctly one type or another; they belong in the middle ground between two extremes. But at one extreme in directing is the virtuoso. He takes the play into his own hands and does with it what he chooses, twists it, makes it his own. He may go the limit in violating its quality, in forcing it to his own ends.

At the other extreme is the director whose aim is to carry out entirely the dramatist's idea. If the play is bombastic he makes his rendering of it bombastic, where it is cold he will be cold, where it is barren he keeps it barren, and so on; he covers nothing, he tries to discover and to restate in theatre terms the play's essential character and the style that expresses this character; to every element in the play he means to give its special quality and intention.

Both these types of directors are artists. If one appears more sharply than the other to be an artist, it is not because of his method, but because what he creates is better or worse. It is a difference in degree, not in kind. We may prefer a performer who tries to play a concerto as closely as he can to what is written rather

than one who sweeps it out of itself to his own mood and will. But in the end what finally decides the question as to whether or not either of the performers is an artist is the thing created. With Liszt, Schubert may become not only the material that Liszt interprets but also the material from which he creates something violently his own. The virtuoso director at his peril does what he wills in directing a play. He may be a good artist or a bad, according to the result that he creates, but he is an artist. The result must judge itself. The original drama may almost disappear before such a director has done with it, but, conceivably at least, we may be willing to forget it quite in order to possess the new creation, as we are willing to forget in El Greco the likeness of trees in order to achieve El Greco. In the theatre the trouble, however, with the virtuoso lies in the fact that there will always be few directors who have as much to give us as have the plays that they direct.

Great talents like Gordon Craig may do what they like with a play, and risk the outcome. Gordon Craig might take *Othello*, for example,

and change it into what, as a whole, it but slightly could be, or read into it something that it scarcely contains at all, and yet create for us a result magnificent in itself. Or he might lift one element in the play to an importance out of all proportion to the whole of it, and by doing so illumine and dilate forever the region that *Othello* can express. A dozen Gordon Craigs bringing to bear on Shakespeare's tragedy this radiant distortion and dilation in twelve different aspects might increase twelve times *Othello's* radiance and scope. But Gordon Craigs are rare. And we are apt to feel that any one so determined to say what he has to say rather than what the dramatist intended, should let the play alone and write another for himself.

The kind of director at the other extreme from the virtuoso would by some persons be rejected entirely as a creative artist—to use a phrase that is often heard but that makes no sense, since an artist is an artist only in so far as he is creative. To reply to that we may best set aside the comparison between the director and the play he uses and El Greco and the trees

that go into his painting of a landscape. Shall we say an orchestra leader and his rendering of a Beethoven Symphony, and a director and the play that he presents? In this case what comes to the artist is already established; as was not the case with the landscape, something is already created. [The score is ready to his hand. Into it the artist, working in his own terms, strives to create life and thus to express it. But if every instrument in the orchestra rendered exactly the score written for it we should still not have the symphony created. Not in nature, ideas, or art is there any truth that is ready and expressed and the same; it is restated in every man that experiences it and as significantly as the observer is significant. No director can give us a play as it is, however faithful his intention may be and however great his ability to carry out his intention. His ideal may be a fine one; he strives to disappear and to leave the play exposed and expressed, to achieve a style that is an invisible medium, like a laboratory glass that reveals the delicate processes of an experiment. But he remains the artist by whose creation this style and revelation may arrive.

MUSIC AS A BASE

The relation among a play's ideas, remarks, events, and emotions, how they follow one another, how they dispose themselves together and so reveal the whole meaning of the play, is expressed, in so far as concerns their precise meanings and definite points, through words and actions. The exact observations that Hamlet has to make on his own failure in the power to act is expressed when he says:

"Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave
That I, the son of a dear father murdered,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words,
And fall a-cursing like a very drab,
A scullion!"

When we see Pirandello's hero daub paint on his face and put on the robes of Henry at Canossa, we know exactly what theme and disguise his plan has followed.

But these are more special and particularized elements of a drama. Beneath them lies the main body of the play. In the whole of it there is the emphasis of one part compared with another; the mass is stressed heavily here and

lightly there, according to its importance in the whole. One speech leaps out from another, propelled by the inner conflict beneath them. One speech is distant from those near it because it arises from meditation in the speaker or from his continuous habit of thought. One speech is ready in the speaker's heart before the thing it seems to answer has been said, its lips were on the other's lips ere they were born. The pulse or beat of a line or a speech or a scene is here quick, there slow; the emotion or thought exhilarates, it retards. All these are a matter of pure relationships. Beneath the particular situation, the particular thoughts, reactions, deeds, every play can be reduced to this abstract basis. Every play has this abstract pattern of values. On this side it is for the most part closely connected with the art of music. A director can best study the layout of a play as if it were a musical composition.

Music, as every one knows, is of all arts, except architecture perhaps, the most ideal. That is to say, music does not involve imitation or concrete instance or definite concept; its region is pure to itself. Music is the beautiful eternity,

the idea, the essence, the general quality. In sum, to take an example, where Hamlet can only say to us,

“I have that within which passeth show,” music can put us into the very state itself out of which this poetry or our tears arise. But this, of course, is a commonplace about the art.

In the play the matter of emphasis, themes and characters and events, the speed, the vocal tone, rest all fundamentally and essentially on a base of music. The relation of the stream of points equidistant from one point is a part of the truth of a circle, an abstract thing. The height of a tower is a part of its idea. The quiet of the vowels and the contemplative measure in one of Virgil's pastoral verses is as much its truth as is the precise thing said in words, and to forget this is to forget the nature of art. To forget this is like saying that a madness to kill is expressed or conveyed in a remark stating, “I am going to kill you,” rather than in the eye and the onward rush of the murderer. The length, the beat, the duration of a speech in a play are a part of its idea. The time between two speeches is a part of their meaning. The tempo at which a cue is taken and the tone of the voice

are as much—and often far more so—the truth of a speech as the more exact and limiting words that are said. When Othello says:

“Never, Iago. Like to the Pontic Sea,
Whose icy current and compulsive course
Ne’er keeps retiring ebb, but keeps due on
To the Propontic and the Hellespont;
Even so my bloody thoughts, with violent pace
Shall ne’er look back, ne’er ebb to humble love,
Till that a capable and wide revenge
Swallow them up——”

the main truth of the outburst, the sheer fact that it is an outburst even, is conveyed by a tremendous current in the declamation, by the vocal tone and flood of sound rather than by the special concept in each and every phrase. And unless this outline and rhythm are established, the speech breaks down into something of forced images and elaborate if not false details.

When Marchbanks, with the poet’s insight, says to Prossy of the arid, hot heart and bitter, drab profession, that he can see nothing in Morell but words, pious resolutions, and asks if it is possible for a woman to love him, and Prossy, after trying to evade the question, says,
“Yes,”

it is obvious that except for her mere acknowl-

edgment of a fact, the whole moving truth must lie in the time she takes before she speaks and in the tone of her voice. When Miss Clare Eames acted the part it was almost wholly her musical sense that made this particular moment in the play so mordant and touching. The Hopkins production of *The Deluge*, very interesting in its intention, wore out long before the end, because in this situation, where a group of people, shut in by the flood and faced with death, show reformations and candid fires not usual with them, and later, when safety comes, revert to their daily selves, the more or less dramatic repetition in the scenes depended for its point on a variation in tempo which was not achieved. And, finally, in the case of individual actors it is their time sense, their sense of the exact moment for a cue, a speech, an answer, that does as much as anything else to engage the audience's attention with its constantly fresh vitality and surprise.

VISUAL MUSIC

There is an element, of course, in the performance of a play that speaks entirely to our eyes. When the director begins to consider the

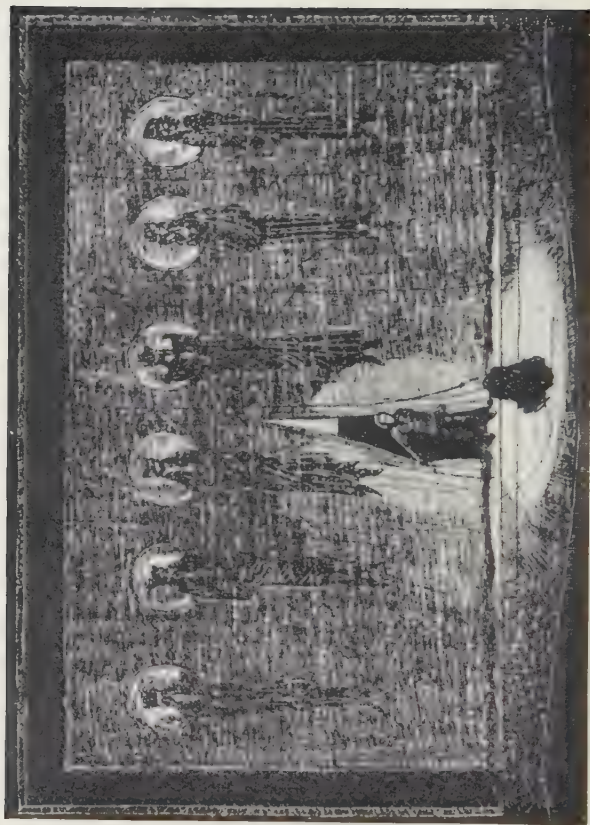
expression of this aspect of a play he may wisely study every part of it as a set of pure relationships, a kind of visual music. He can study as he might a symphony what is the essential idea of a play and what groups, motions, positions will most help in expressing through the eye what the other dramatic mediums are expressing through our other faculties or channels of perception. He can define those lines and masses on the stage, and then subordinate what is secondary and omit some of the confusion of empty or extraneous movements. He can study a scene for its last, fundamental idea or characteristic and try to find what line, what visual quality, will most express the essential idea of the scene; and can employ that line as something in itself expressive. And he can seek to establish what is most important of all these, the visual continuity of the scene, its living rhythm in our eyes, from the time it begins till it ends.

THE DIRECTOR'S MEDIUM

Granted a clear or important idea for the play that he will present and the means and ability to carry it through, the director has still a problem like that of any artist, who for the pros-



Ben-Ami as the poet in Lenormand's "Failures," produced by the Theatre Guild, 1921



Design by Robert Edmond Jones for "Hamlet," Scene 3, Act III.

A front-drop curtain. The king faces the audience, his hands raised in supplication to heaven; behind him Hamlet enters, in a search to kill the king and standing with drawn sword pointing at the object of his design—a remarkably complete visual statement of a scene's essential idea.

perity of a work has to consider what tact and judgment he will use to achieve the right relationship between the work and the public. There is a point beyond which if an artist carries his idea he will lose the sympathy of his public and so defeat his own end, which is to express his idea to them. On the other hand, too much consideration of his public may prevent the artist's going far enough to reach the point at which his idea will get itself expressed. In every art some concession, obviously, is unescapable; music, for instance, has to be loud enough to be audible; the musician must concede that much at least to his public. But in general as an artist you may choose to trim your sails in order to arrive at your wished-for port, or you may choose to miss the temporary destination or success and instead to stretch the bounds of your art, to chart new seas, to sight new forms, new possibilities for expression. You take your choice at your peril and according to your own nature.

But the artist directing in the theatre has to remember that the theatre essentially is an impure medium. It consists not only of what is on the stage but of the audience in front.

The director will have to make an imaginative choice and proportionment of parts, so as not to leave out the audience from his creation. However prophetic or illuminating the stage end of his creation may be, if the audience is not rightly involved in it the creation suffers, as might be the case with a pianist who insisted on pouring water into the instrument for the sake of some future aquatic scale, but failed of any sound or anything besides his strong idea or inspiration. The director has to consider what effect he most seeks, what is the truth that he would most express. When this is found he must relate every detail to it, taking his choice as to how far he is creating for a complete present moment and how far for future innovation or extension. A thing admirably right in itself may, when the audience sees it, jump out of the frame and distort the whole picture. An unwelcome detail, however true in itself, may either wreck the truth of a whole scene or send it to a thrilling pitch. To say what has never been allowed said on the stage, what has been more or less banned as crass or outrageous, may swamp the play or may double its expressiveness. The director

may take whatever chance he likes, but he has to work in all the elements of his art—the play, the actors, the audience.

RESTATEMENTS OF PLAYS

When a play is new, hot from the author's forge, it may be taken as written for its own time, its idea is stated for the dramatist's own generation. The director's business is an interpretation of it in theatrical terms. But when there is a play to be revived, a few years or some centuries from its birth, the director's problem takes on another shift in restatement.

In so far as a play was ever a work of art it was a living thing. Within his dramatic form the dramatist has arrested and found a right body for a section in the stream of life. Life may be said to rise and to fill for a moment such a form. But the very essence of life as distinguished from the dead is this streaming, this ever-changing current of it. The living content, no longer wholly arrested in this form, goes on with its stream and is not to be distinguished from it. The form without the content is empty and dead. In the history of an art the process toward degeneration, and

through and past that to a new summit of excellence, a new epoch, consists of two courses: First, there is the survival of the form with less and less of the sustaining life that once brought the form into being; this is the so-called decadence of an art. Second, there is the progress of a new quality of life needing its body and moving toward a form that will contain and express it.

In Euripides's *Bacchæ* Dionysos, the god of ever-springing life and enthusiasm and ecstasy, could not be bound; prison-bars, fetters, no obstacle had power to hold him fast. Only the forms of his own passion and of his own thought and his own motion could contain his divine life.

Pirandello, for the modern theatre, has dramatized this idea. The theme in Pirandello's work is the dualism between Life on one hand and Form on the other; on the one hand Life pouring in a stream, unknowable, obscure, unceasing; on the other hand forms, ideas, crystallizations, in which we try to embody and express this ceaseless stream of Life. Upon everything lies the burden of its form, which alone separates it from dust, but which also interferes with the unceasing flood of Life in it.

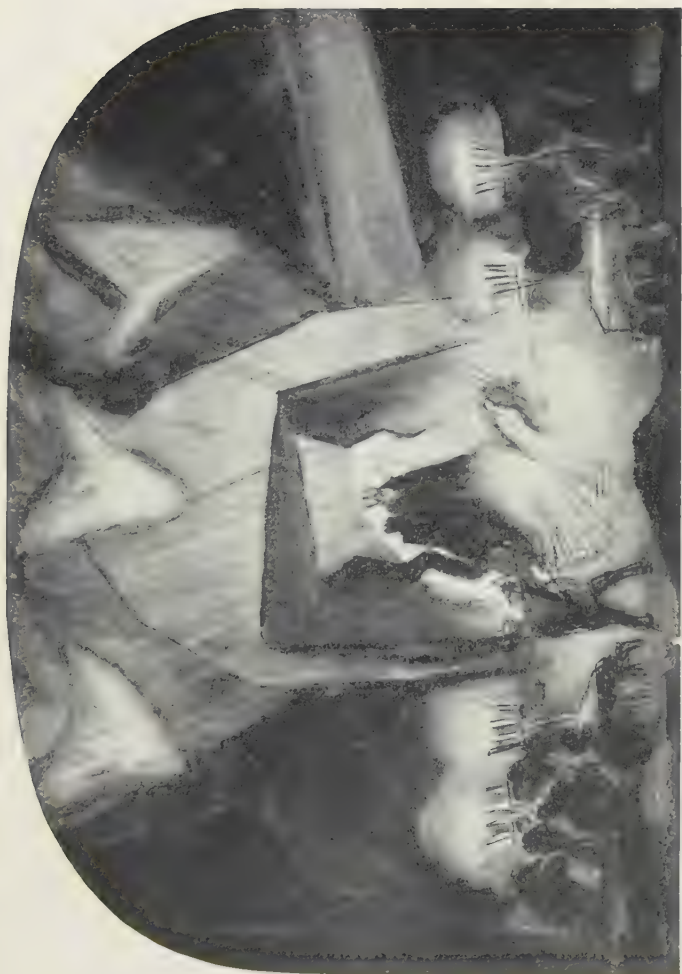
In *Henry IV* this man who has taken on Form, a fixed mask in the midst of changing Life, remains in it until the moment when his passion and despair and violent impulse send him back into Life. But only for a moment; the impetuous violence of the Life in him expels him into his masquerade again; in his tragic struggle between Life and Form, Life is defeated, Form remains.

To many a play, when it is revived, comes such a fate as this. The life in the play is defeated, the ironic form remains.

The performance of a play at the director's hands is not a mere matter of the written text. Its truth can arise only from the combination of this text as it stands, plus the audience for whom it is given. In so far as a play is alive the living element in it is an impalpable, on-running, delicately perilous reality on which an illusion of permanence has been imposed by its form. The life in *Macbeth*, for example, seems to be permanently expressed by the play as we read it, and this might seem to hold true even for its performance. But this, in fact, is not the case. In such a performance there might be academic phases of interest. As history of

literature, as drama, as Shakespearian tragedy, it might, if you choose, possess an interest. But such kinds of interest, though studious and engaging, are apart from the play's vitality as art. And this is just the point at which we need most the director's imagination, need the genius in him for re-creating the play in the necessary new terms.

That side of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* that is a living thing, that speaks to the life in us and arouses a response from it, and fecundates and increases the volume of that life, must be restated in every revival—and in a sense, indeed, at every performance—of the play. The life in this play is not a fact, it is not a fixed and permanent statement; it is an ever-changing reality, unconfined, a ceaseless flux, but real. The sixteenth-century *Macbeth* of Shakespeare derives from an earlier and more primitive base. It has beneath it such an element of shock and terror as is to be found nowhere else in drama. This primitive quality Shakespeare restated in terms of the morality and the complex style of his own Elizabethan age, and lo, we have his *Tragedy of Macbeth*. And now, in turn, this primitive quality and



The Huguenots. Design by Robert L. Ingham. Scene for the Huguenots, production of "The Huguenots."



Design by Robert Edmond Jones for "The Saint."

this Elizabethanness must be restated for us. Even if a director could discover every fact, every piece of business, exact reading, gesture, tone, of the first production of *Macbeth*, and could reproduce them for us to the last jot, he would not necessarily convey to us the life in the play. He might give us only something beautifully curious or antiquarian or historic, exhibitions in facsimile, but not *Macbeth* and its meaning to us. No, his business as an artist is to discover a rendering for *Macbeth*—which is his material—through his medium—which is first the actors and the décor of his theatre—to discover a rendering of such a kind as will restate for the audience present the significance of the life of the play. There is no right way to produce *Macbeth*. It would be a comfort to think so, to have something to rest upon, just as some right way of living would be a comfort. But with life and with art the same thing holds: the essence of being alive is a constant, perilous choice and a constant projection of imagination into living forms.

A part of the truth of a Greek play is its distance from us in time. To be alive it has to be restated for us somewhat as its original mate-

rial had to be restated in it. For us a part of a Greek play's truth is its Greekness, with all that that may mean for us. In Restoration times a gentleman often carried a little bowl of gold or silver which he could take from his pocket and rest on the arm of his chair, and into it from time to time might spit. Molière's gallants did a smart thing when they took a comb from their pockets and arranged their curls as they sat in a lady's salon. But the director who wished to give us the quality of gallant gentlemen in his revival of these social comedies could not show us such details, they would defeat his ends and give us not elegance but only ugliness. These are simple instances, but they illustrate the case. What in these particular instances needs most to be conveyed is the living thing, the permanent idea in them to which we respond—in sum, their elegance. At whatever cost, this must be created or the moment is empty.

The director's revival of a play, then, is a form of creation, and in so far as this is not so the play lies dead on the stage, a mere fact, the empty shell where once there was an engaging life. All compromise, change, or emphasis in a

new production of an old play can have but this one end, which is in a way to keep it alive. The extent to which the director preserves closely the play in its original shape, or violates or distorts it, re-creates its essentials in new terms or even forces it so that we hardly recognize it for the same play, may affect the success of his enterprise, but it does not alter the principle involved. There are as many ways of doing *Macbeth* as there are generations of human life; and in its production the perpetual creation of a right body to express its truth is the condition on which alone *Macbeth* is kept not merely a matter of culture but a thing that is alive in our experience.

USE OF THE ACTOR

When the director, as an orchestra leader might, has achieved through the actors under him the desired emphasis throughout the performance, the time values, the tone, and so on, he remains to be considered as any artist in general making use of the means at hand. We may think of him as an artist in the use of his medium.

Of late years there has arisen in the theatre

a type of directing that proceeds on the basis of letting the actor alone. Up to the point of collision with the other players the actor can go his own way and almost unmolested in creating his rôle. The principle is to get good actors and let them go ahead. Up to a certain point this policy has worked. But it has been a limited and often fatal method. Provided you get good actors, and in cases where only one or two actors carry the whole burden of the scene and can, perhaps, work it out between the two of them, you may succeed. But in general the scheme is almost as hopeless as turning a crew of sailors loose without an officer to run the ship. And, moreover, this method leads to a relaxation and laziness in the director himself.

The other extreme in directing actors is an older and more tried policy. In it the one hand controls everything and every one involved in the play, and not only controls the actor but dominates his conception of a rôle and the entire playing of it. Such a director at such an extreme may even give the actor the tone, the gesture, the movement. He may, when he likes, make the actor an imitation of himself. Up to a certain point this method also has often

worked. If we must choose, it is on the whole safer than the opposite extreme. Provided the director himself has ideas that are capable of making the play into something worth while, and has the force or control to work the actors into his will, he may succeed. And the discouraging inferiority of the mass of actors seems to argue for such a tyranny. But it obviously throws away no little of the individual resonance of the actor. And it tends to mechanize actors and to make them stale. It gives them stage tricks where real invention is needed; it leads them toward a more or less passive exploitation of themselves.

The necessity of the second method, the one controlling head for the performance, is plain. The whole scale of the play finally depends on that. The good element in the first method, the hands-off-and-let-the-actor-do-it school of directing, consists in the fact that at its best it allows the actor freedom to create and the possibility of succeeding in himself, of happiness in his own soul. It leads him toward becoming a better and better medium in which the director may work. The ideal directing combines the two methods.

But of the actor as medium there is more to say. As the medium in which the director works, the actor may be thought of somewhat as paint is thought of for the painter or marble for the sculptor. In every work of art the artist takes his material from nature or experience and translates it into his medium, creating in it, as he works, something that was not there before. His creation is partly in terms of his material and partly in terms of the medium employed. Our consciousness of the medium is a part of our perception of a work of art and of our pleasure in it. One among the many reasons why Velasquez is a great painter lies in the distinction with which the paint itself is a part of his work: the texture, the brush, the density of the painting medium, and the color as well are a part of the idea that Velasquez's picture presents. In Shakespeare, at his best, along with the dramatic emotion and the thought we have always a sense of words being employed, of sheer phrasing and diction, as a part of our delight. Something of the truth of an Egyptian statue is in the granite of it.

In the director's use of his actors it ought to be true that the more he can use in his scheme

of the play the actor's own stuff, the better. The different truths of a great sculpture in wood and a great sculpture in marble will consist partly of the difference between wood and marble. It ought to be the fact that a certain deepening in the truth of an actor's contribution to a play will derive from the actor's getting his results in terms of himself, making up out of his own elements the result that he creates. It will allow a better chance for those explosive accidents that we call inspiration, those moments when the actor is carried beyond his own plan or clear intention. At such moments a certain unexpected contribution to the director's creation may come from the medium itself, which may contribute to his invention, give him an idea. Many an architect has got a design, a motive, a form, from some quality of texture, color, or weight of the stone that he is using. The limitations of marble may invite no little of the sculptor's pattern. This might be called keeping the medium alive. The director brings the actor's own truth to the creation of the larger truth that the director is after.

If, for example, then, you have, as in Lenor-

mand's *Les Ratés*, a scene in which a crude black man is brought suddenly to the discovery of a corpse and cries aloud, it ought to be true that the first thing to do is to let the actor make the cry himself, express his own kind of emotion in his own kind of cry, and then to use all this as far as possible rather than to start by explaining the emotion and giving him a cry to imitate. If an actor, rehearsing for the storm scene in *King Lear*, feels a certain way in the part, the director may use this feeling as far as he can toward the creation of the feeling that he himself wishes to express. He must believe that his actors are souls as well as bodies, and that the creation he seeks is composed of all our human elements. In sum, such a use of the actor medium by the director ought to be the means of keeping his performance alive in all its parts, as a good painter keeps the paint or a good sculptor keeps the marble alive in every inch of his surface.

1. Take the sleep-walking scene in *Macbeth*. If Lady Macbeth enters from your right as you face the stage, what difference in the thing expressed do you get if she sets down her candle just after her entrance, and then proceeds gradually across the stage to her exit, instead of setting down her candle as she reaches the middle of the stage, pausing to take the passage where she wrings her hands, and then proceeding toward her exit?

2. In the Hopkins production of *Hamlet* with John Barrymore, in Scene 3, Act III, the King knelt at the front of the stage facing the audience, Hamlet entered directly behind him. The King's hands were up in prayer, Hamlet's sword pointed toward the King. Draw a pattern of lines which literally expresses the dramatic relationship of the two figures.

3. Take the persons as units and draw lines between them, plotting out a design or pattern of positions that would best help to express visually the dramatic essential of the moment in the Closet Scene where Hamlet speaks to the Ghost.

4. At the time a play is written there is in every effect a certain value, a certain set of relationships which remain the same so long as the elements that make them up remain the same. But when change in one of these elements comes, a new adjustment has to be made to keep the relationship of the values that was originally intended by the dramatist.

5. How might the assassination of Julius Cæsar as Shakespeare has written it and meant it vary in its implications at various times and in various places? Mention some time in some country when this scene might be denounced by the public taste as too Bolshevik, or another time as too capitalistic, or as too realistic, or as too formal and classical.

How in each case would the director interpreting the play for an audience of his contemporaries set about to preserve the values that Shakespeare intended?

6. In florid scenery what happens to the dramatist's florid description of the scene where he locates his action? What effect might an electrical storm, rendered as we see it in a modern piece, have on King Lear's lines as they were written to be given in the Elizabethan theatre?

7. Suppose the dramatist wishes to express the idea or theme of personal honor. In Calderon's *The Painter of His Own Dishonor* it is done by means of a story in which a man kills his suspected wife, innocent or not, lest even a breath of suspicion fall on his honor. This served the uses of sixteenth-century Spain. For present-day San Francisco or London could any director get this play so restated as to convey Calderon's essential idea, its elevation, seriousness, high vitality, and passionate urgency to the human soul?

What drastic change has taken place in the values of the elements that go to make up his theme?

What about the problem that the director might confront to produce this play at Reno, Nev.?

8. Take Duse at fifty-five and some young player like Helen Mencken or Shirley Mason in the rôle of Juliet, and say what advantageous points on each side might there be, always regarding the performance as art.

9. What difference would appear in the love-scene of Congreve's *Way of the World* at the hands of a poetic director as distinguished from the same scene directed by a witty realist?

Consider the difference in effect that would arrive

from the following plays produced by a realistic and by a poetic method:

Synge's *Riders to the Sea*, Shaw's *Cæsar and Cleopatra*, Benavente's *The Bonds of Interest*, Jonson's *The Silent Woman*, Goldoni's *La Locandiera*, Shakespeare's *Othello*.

VIII

THEATRE REALITIES

THE VOICE IN THE THEATRE

IF the psychology of our day has stressed anything it is the fact that the life of the mind rests on historically ancient processes, on the constituted matter of the universe. That is to say, we are grown out of and into nature; we are a part of its texture, of its tissue even; and what we call ourselves is only the little conscious point at which we connect with the whole, and through which we enter on a conception of the whole. The life of the mind has the same relation to nature as the fragrance of a flower has to the earth; our consciousness is the light fragrance of a flower, but this fragrance is the odor of reality. It is only through all this accumulated history that is in us, the remembering organisms, the unforgetting cells and growths, that we share in the life of the world. And only through the exploitation and use of this sharing can we express for the rest of the whole the living part of it that we are.

It follows, then, that art depends first of all

on the life of the body, that body which is at the same time the ancient storehouse of the forms and pulses and directions of a whole; and yet is its feeling organ, its every moment's intimate perceiving. In the art of the theatre, then, to throw away such an avenue as is the sense of sound is short-sighted and suicidal. It is a way of limiting the expression of life, of forgetting the necessary earth, of telling lies. And in our theatre it is a fact that sound is almost a forgotten thing. The voice is used in our theatre almost entirely as an articulate medium. But a part of every truth is its inarticulateness: all the half-conscious elements, delicate implications, the radiant and shadowy emanations that make up every human truth, and that words can never express. And sound itself has significance. The articulate meaning of the word *pain* is a symbolistic accident; the sound of it goes vaguely but farther in. Regardless of word concepts the mere voice is another medium to express the ancient and imminent life that lives itself in us.

Every one knows the part a dramatist's sound takes in his complete effect. Shakespeare obviously is always recognized first of all by

the ear. Very much of Galsworthy's failure to convince me, I think, lies in the abandoned and easy drought of his music. And I believe that one of the obstacles of Ibsen's progress with us, something that makes his work seem dry and dutiful and Euclidean, is the sterile sound of the acting translation; a humble ear would take Mrs. Alving for Madame Pr sident calling the ladies to order, and stating her case for their consideration. Every dramatist has his own voice and every language has its voice. But it must be remembered that the voice is inextricably tied up with its language. We complain of the Italian singer's voice as "white"; but Italian is a "white" language. We complain of the German tone as "dark"; but German, and English too, are "dark" languages. Mimi Aguglia's voice, amazing in Italian, animal, pathetic, inexhaustible, becomes light and uninteresting when she speaks English. Ben-Ami is one of the few foreigners I have heard who can place exactly and naturally in English the tone they have always used. And Miss Doris Keane is the only actor I have ever seen who could reproduce the Italian tone precisely in English.

The voice of a country's theatre, like the English or French or Italian, gets to be as definite perhaps as an actor's. There is the American stage voice, with its tone driven through the nose, its inflexible upper lip, its bad placement in the throat, and its frequent monotony. There is the English voice with its dry, balanced quality suited so well to their social comedy but lacking in range and fluency, too full of aspirated breath, and without much mettle or resonance in the head; the French voice with its training, its style, its adequacy for its dramatic use; the moving Russian voice; the Italian voice, the best of all, a free tone, a tragic timbre, a wide range and abundance of power. Style in the use of voice implies in one sense a personal distinction. But in general it means a use of the voice that finds the same essential quality that the matter to be said possesses. Style in an actor's or a theatre's voice would mean a constant variation of the timbre, the delivery, and enunciation to suit the kind of play it carries or the mood. In a comedy of manners like *The School for Scandal*, for example, the voice would be clear, finished, the lips expert, the tongue striking well on the teeth; the

tone would go up and down but always be sure of its place in the throat, be crisp, shining, in hand, like the satin and gold of the furniture and costumes, the rapier at the wrist, the lace over it, the wordliness, and the wit. In Chekhov it would have the last naturalness, every closeness to feeling and impulse that the moment reveals. In Shakespeare a range of elaborate music, suited to the style, a clearness, with a warmth of poetic emotion. In D'Annunzio's drama the voice would have to be rich and sensuous, metallic, shading infinitely, the voice of a degenerate god. And so on through the styles and moods of all drama.

It is, of course, a platitude in æsthetics to say that music is the most ideal of the arts. Music can be the thing itself where words can only be the concept of it or painting one selected phenomenon. In the light of this you may say that an actor's voice is his most important medium. You may say that the tone an actor uses can move us more than any other thing about him. The word he speaks gives the concept, the gesture he makes exhibits a single phenomenon; but the voice may be anger itself or longing, and may go straight, as music

does, to the same emotion in us. So that there is something strange and ironical in the realization of how much more our theatres—and our education for that matter—have cultivated the eye rather than the ear. We have all sorts of instructions about stage production, about light and its uses and diversities, about the effect of colors and their combinations. In Gordon Craig's design for *Electra* we have the idea of that door, high and fateful and unrevealing, the domination of visual proportion over our sense. In the best settings we have sometimes had light and color and line made as ideal almost and as abstract as music. But, after all, that is the realm of the visual, it is eye learning.

So that we may well recall what education the Greeks thought wise for the uses of their sons. Philosophy, rhetoric, oratory and recitation, and music, were the main branches of their endeavor. Sculpture and painting and architecture, those arts whose life is in the eye, they learned to know by seeing them and by the images arising from the perfecting of their bodies in the daily palæstra. But often enough the philosophy that they learned, the history

and poetry and logic, came through discourses and argument and reading aloud, and much of what they knew well they may never have seen in writing; they had received it in sound images instead of visual. The Greek ear was trained to hear the value of syllables and rhythm and cadence in speech, the modes of music and the quality of the voice in reading and singing. Through years of discipline and practice a Greek arrived at this perfection of exercise and perception.

In the theatre of Dionysos the lighting was that of the sun; the scene was but slightly varied either through shifts or through light. The gestures were simple and restrained, as we may infer from the spirit and the style of the plays, and may be sure of from the difficulties that the costume, the onkos, the padding, and the high-soled cothurnus would have put in the way of animated motions. The expression of the mask remained unchanged, but it was made so as to serve as a resonator for the actor's voice. So that the larger part of the effect in the Greek theatre was due to the voices, trained as we train for the opera and exerted for a trained public taste. However beautiful the

lines of those garments may have been, their grave and exquisite rhythms and their subtlety of color in the bright air, the blowing on them of the wind from the Bay of Salamis, it was the voices of the actors that achieved much of that effect of tragic beauty. The words of the dramatist were conveyed through the voice, animated by the beauty and variety of its music; and sometimes heightened further still by the music of pipes and strings that followed the voice, dilating further the poetic meaning, making it yet more poignant and unerring.

"Cynthius aurem vellit, et admonuit," Virgil wrote, when the god of poetry came to him; and Milton, translating: "Phœbus replied, and touched my trembling ears."

To all that antique world the ear was the seat of memory. And memory is half our life, and more than half of all beauty.

TALENT

I remember several years ago seeing Miss Doris Keane as the prima donna in Edward Sheldon's *Romance*. I remember how startled I was. There was a voice that went straight to its objective, hit the ear like a gesture. The

sudden, startling vivacity of tone leapt out in a speech now and then like a red bird out of the shadows; the laugh cut like a bright whip across the moment. There was a fine plastic gift, a living use of the hands; the wrists were eloquent in their lines. There was a beautiful floating movement across the stage when the actress walked, an urgent and compelling pantomime. And finally, there was over everything done a sense of a certain droll pungency of intelligence. And all these qualities seemed to be somehow the actress's body; her very presence seemed to be the truth of them.

For talent is ultimately a thing of the body. It goes back to the body as music does to the ear-drum and the nerves of hearing; it gives an important continuity to the person, and makes it not only true but necessary that the greatest actors always in a sense act themselves. But what talent may be, with all its separability, vividness, vitality, and magnetism, you cannot say exactly. Talent in an actor has a mysterious difference from mere capacity for hard work, though work perfects it by sifting out its special and right mode of expression, and so frees it to be its essential self. It differs



Doris Keane in "Romance."



The art of Giovanni Grasso, the great Sicilian actor, is spontaneous; it is distinguished by a fine dramatic rhythm, vivid, elemental power, and an extraordinary physical equipment.

from intention, however earnest; for talent is an organic thing—to take a term from science—as distinguished from inorganic; it is a part of the structure, the organism, the living tissue of the person who possesses it rather than something to be taken on, desired, and labored at. And talent is an immediate thing. To those who have an eye for it, talent is discernible at once when it comes on the stage; it establishes a kind of luminosity of the presence, a radiance of the body seen to be living out the moment there. When an actor with talent is on the stage with actors who have none, he seems to stand apart from them, to flow toward them and from them, to be a living thing separate from the rest, who appear to be surroundings in which creation has not yet happened. It is the quality of this difference that indicates the reason why talent cannot be defined. Talent is inexpressible, like all natural things. It is its own description. Like all things that are a part of nature, talent alone, through its own manifestation, can convey itself completely to us.

THE TRAGIC GOOSE-STEP

I remember once, on an autumn afternoon, seeing a *matinée* of poetic plays, or rather scenes from them, given by a group of young actors at a certain theatre. The plays were Elizabethan, scenes from Marlowe, Beaumont and Fletcher, and the somewhat later Otway. There was a separate director for each dramatist represented.

I arrived late, ten minutes or so. And as my eye lighted on the scene I saw that a dialogue had just closed; the lady stood in the middle of the stage and the gentleman was in the act of departing, moving toward a door in the wings. My attention was at once caught by his unusual movement. His hips seemed at each step to congeal themselves, to become rigid, and from this rigid pivotage the leg shot out toward the floor, a straight, inflexible line. And as the heel of each foot struck the floor, the impact registered in the hip above it and the whole body made a solemn vibration of resistance to the trodden earth beneath. The nostrils, too, grew firmer.

I watched the various scenes. The young

ladies in them seemed to have little idea at all of what was to be done. You got the general impression that if one wears a snood like a lady of Marlowe's time, one must have a rosebud mouth and a virginal, versified cast of countenance. The artistic creed set forth most strongly seemed to be a demonstration of the fact that the human body looks well enough without stays after all, and that if one stands a little sway-backed in a long white robe with a slanting girdle or rope of pearls around one's waist and dropping between one's knees, one can indicate a creditable enough figure of a woman. As for the verse, that was spoken smoothly, ravingly, chantingly, stertorously, or in a sublime calm above all mere meaning or sense, in whatever way fortune willed. But if the reading varied, the step was everywhere, the getting across the stage was always the same, and no artist failed to register its measured delays and stalking rhythm. To that extent at least the entire afternoon was uniform.

At last it was clear to me what this stride was about; this tragic goose-step, so inexplicable otherwise, meant that we were acting poetry.

It was the gait of immortality, the ritual of bardolatry. And then I realized how well it might serve as a symbol for most of the trouble that blocks the way of our poetic drama.

In our theatre the minute we recognize that a thing is poetry we make something separate of it. We give the poetic a sort of worship; which means, as Bernard Shaw said once of heroes, that everybody bows down to it and nobody does its will. To do the will of poetry is to take it naturally.

But we Anglo-Saxons are a great race for setting things apart, for separating them from our plain and usual tracks. Even religion we tend to separate from us. The spirit of it may be in our daily living, but the expression, the celebration of it, and especially its more formal celebration, we set off to itself. We carry no chickens, ducks, or vegetables into church with us.

Whereas in Italy or in Spain people come into the church as they might cross a street. There is no change in the natural habitude of that more serious region. They kneel, if they are simple folk, with their baskets at their sides, and watch the heart-shaped candle flames

on the altar ahead of them, the incense rising in the dusk, the motions of the priest, the vestments, the music, the words repeated over and over. And they know that this is only another department of life, in no way different from the rest, a part of our natures needing expression. They know that here these motions and the mood of this ceremony become formal and graver only because they may thus become natural to the thing expressed; that the remoteness of the expression is there only because in this more ultimate region of the day's living there is remoteness and the simplification of our thought and spirit.

And so in poetry. Acting poetic plays in our theatre is a kind of going to church, as we use the word, with all the awe, particularity, tedium, and unfrequentedness implied. The very legs of those autumnal actors were stiffened with this poetic specialty, this apartness of verse; and with it their throats were routed. But in Spain the audience scarcely knows when the play is prose and when it is verse, or when, as happens there so often, the same play passes back and forth from one to the other. Every year around Hallowe'en in Madrid Zorilla's

Don Juan Tenorio is given for five nights in all the principal theatres. And there is no actor in it but goes from prose to verse and back again without batting an eyelash and with the utmost naturalness. And in Italy the same audience and the same actors experience the gorgeous poetry of D'Annunzio or the beautiful, warm, marble quality of Morselli, and the realism of Giacosa and Marco Praga without any specializing whatever. And so with them the realm of poetry is ventilated, is healthy and natural.

In our theatre the health and the possibility of creating and of acting poetic drama lies in our understanding one fact: that there is no difference in kind between what we call poetic and what we call prose. No difference in kind. We may have arrangements obviously, genres if you like, in verse or in prose. But on the whole they are related to each other, the poetic and the prosaic, exactly as the moments of life are related to each other. In life, for instance, we have particular moments of deep feeling, say, or suspense. We do not separate these, hold them compartmentally off to themselves. What happens is a gradual heightening, an in-

tensification of our beings. The pulse concentrates its stroke, it is quicker or it seems almost suspended; but its existence is deepened and made more compulsive. The body increases its life, it moves toward more complete unity. The mind is charged with a vaster region in which it dilates and seems to breathe a wider air. The whole of us, mind, body, spirit, is driven toward a simplification, a oneness. We draw more easily and luminously a radiance from ourselves and from the life of the world that we have shared. And though all this may happen in a graver or a lighter mood, the point remains the same. And that is what the poetic is, then, in our existence. It differs in no way generically from prose, exactly as the moments of a life do not differ in kind but only in completeness from one another. And that is what the poetic is in the art of the theatre. The rhythm, the word, the incident do not essentially change. They are only driven down into their inmost substances. By a heightening in vitality they are simplified; and through that, at the same moment they are made more subtle. They become more accurate. They become truer to the experience expressed.

For an actor or a producer when these plays of the poetic sort are presented, what ought to happen does not necessarily mean any change in method as compared to the prose play. Even in Racine, to take an extreme case, the method changes only in the sense that it fits itself to an accepted and confessed conventionalization of idea and form. And in the poetic drama as we have it in English—in most of it at least—there need be no change whatever. All that need happen is what happens in our lives. Where the intensity and accuracy of effect approaches a larger and simpler order or a more passionate ornament in beauty and imagined grace, there the gesture, the delivery, the expression follow. Even in the reading of verse the same holds true; there is no distinct method implied or necessary. Verse requires a better use of the tongue, the lips, the sense of tempo, the vocal tone only because of its greater accuracy to the meaning. Good verse follows its content exactly. It is in form precisely true to its sense. To read it, then, requires no ramping about like he-muses marching to Parnassus, no startled reverence, but only an increased exactitude.

For a sudden break to come into the actor's life, into his brain, his spine, his knees, his throat, his soul, when he hits this poetic phase of dramatic experience, is for him to falsify the thing he undertakes. The only reverence worth while in art is not one that jerks the legs about, blows up the lungs and gets the soul on a high horse. It is a reverence that, once under way, is scarcely conscious of itself save for the quiet amplitude or the beautiful ease or absorbing intensity or passion or elevation or clarity or spacious precision that has come into the moment.

1. Can you recall a performance spoiled by the actor's quality of voice?

2. Can you imagine a case in an actor's performance where you could detect the intention behind the moment, but where the voice failed to be adequate for the expression of this intention, either through bad use or through the inferiority of the voice itself? Specify some actor in whom you have distinctly felt this to be the case.

3. Can you imagine a producer casting, to a certain extent at least, by voice qualities? In the part of Halmar in *The Wild Duck*, for instance, what kind of voice would reveal the character most readily, so that you would know almost as soon as the actor spoke some of the characteristics of the man portrayed?

4. Mention some of the thousands of instances in the art of the theatre where the quality and tone of voice must express many times more than the words themselves as they appear in the written text.

5. Is it not possible, as in the case of Bernhardt, Mansfield, and other much lesser artists, for sheer voice at times to run quite away with the scene, and to swamp the exact and dramatic truth that is to be expressed?

6. One way of showing that the part of Lady Macbeth has more universality than that of Hedda Gabbler is to show how much more it requires of the actress' voice, how much more vocal range and cultivation it demands. In this respect compare Oswald Alving to *Œdipus*, Paula Tanqueray to *Ophelia*, Othello to *Alceste*, Millamant to *Portia*, Rosalind to *Jocasta*, Clytemnestra to Racine's *Phèdre*, Lady Teazle to *Magda*, Eilert Lövborg to *Dr. Faustus*, Ibsen's *Nora* to Dumas' *Lady of the Camelias*.

IX

DUSE

DUSE's last visit to America, called to a sudden stop by her death before the end of the season, brought to our theatre an influence and quality that no words can record. Duse was not primarily and glowingly of the theatre. I should not say that she was the greatest actor that I have seen, but that she seemed of them all the greatest artist. More than any other Duse brought to the art of acting the largest and most poignant idea, the profoundest sensitivity, the deepest and most exquisite response to experience. Of all the people in the theatre she had most in common with great poetry, great joy and sorrow and beauty, great living. But her acting was, as one saw very quickly, a mere fragment of her. You got the sense in her that her art arose from her life and what she was, as the form of waves and their light and color arise from the large realm of the sea.

You never heard of Duse as you heard of Bernhardt, for example, whose splendors long

since dazzled the world of men, and whose art had something about it that was easily detected as art, or at least accomplishment, by the average person. Bernhardt's genius was essentially public in its character; and there was no wit so slow or so untutored and no eye so dull as not to know that when she played, the universal elements were shaken, and passions that might have been domesticated and blurred by now became suddenly glamorous and superb. That Bernhardt was limited is obvious. She had a limited range of ideas, such ideas, for instance, as amorous seduction, pain and anger—the famous rage through tears—and the infinite throes of dying. She had certain type conceptions—limited in range though not in raw force—of the passionate, the ornate, the regal, the comic, the poetic. She had vast monotonies of temperament, however brilliant or strong. Her physical equipment—most of all the immortal voice—was extraordinary but limited in possibilities of style. Bernhardt had, too, an undiluted egotism that very often swamped the play, the other actors, and everything else save the audience's response to herself. To her all art was a passion of self, a

splendor of an artist's mood, though to her, also, art was the only important thing in the world.

The public saw always that Bernhardt was a stupendous event in human enterprises. She amazed, thrilled, defeated them; she dominated even if she bored them; she delighted, exalted, and made them shiver with ice on their spines. She established, apart from herself and the moment of life that she wrought to her stage purposes, a magnificent whole idea, a popular image vastly entertaining and unforgettable, whatever else it might be, good or bad. Bernhardt had something mythical about her like a volcano. People found in her something they could recognize though they might not be able to moralize it. They could see in her a kind of sheer life principle which they could enjoy without being able to understand, something in her that the instinct of life in them drove them toward as a magnificent example of what they sensed to be the springs of all our energy and imagination—I mean elemental power.

With Duse there was no such thing. She could never have been an overpowering actress in the ordinary sense. She could not even have

recited as Bernhardt was able to do, in any elaborate, heroic diction and with any of that incomparable vocal spell that Bernhardt knew how to weave. Artists over Europe were drawn to her almost unendurable tenderness and truth; in Italy her audiences alternately worshipped and railed at her. With her there was nothing audacious and spectacular, nothing violent, seductive, or world-wide. Her glamour was of another sort.

Duse was not the equal mimic in any and all styles, as Garrick seems to have been. She could never have lifted a rôle to any classic fatality and splendor as Mounet Sully could do in *Œdipus*. She had not a certain golden lustre that Ellen Terry had. She could not have exhibited that wild animality, speed, passion and impetus that Mimi Aguglia at her best moments appears to exercise without effort; as Grasso does also, and others of the Sicilian theatre. She had nothing of that romantic epic style that Chaliapin brings to Boris. She had none of the gusto and bravura of an actor like Coquelin. And Réjane had more brilliance.

Some of these qualities and accomplishments Duse obviously might have had if her nature

and idea had led her to the classical heroic or the seductive or the highly veneered, the stylized, the violent, the brilliantly comic, or superbly epical. She might have crowned some tradition or school. On the contrary, however, when we come to Duse in the art of acting, it must be said that she was one of those artists, appearing from time to time in every art, who tend to break down the long and painfully built structure of the art they profess. To them their mere craft is only a clutter of old boards, rags, a necessary but obstructing shell. Their passion is truth, an immediate and urging truth in them. These artists by their labor and gifts master the domain of the art with a security and completeness that few artists professing it can ever hope to approach. But whatever craft one of these artists masters he smashes, restates, forces to vanish, scorns save only as a means to an end. Duse could never be a school or a craft, her method was herself. She would have nothing of acting for itself; she was like those who despise their bodies save only as the body disappears before the spirit within that is to be revealed. She had no tricks, no efforts to attract or pique or impress, but only the desire

to exist in the life to which she had given herself for those two hours on the stage, only the desire to convey to us and to confirm for herself the infinity of living within the woman she portrayed there. This detachment and intense absorption with the truth she endured and expressed gave Duse's art its extraordinary purity, free of all exterior considerations and effects.

And so it was that you could not easily get from Duse's acting a pure acting delight. She was not the actor's actor, as Velasquez was the painter's painter, or Spenser the poet's poet. That is to say, you could not delight in her performance as supreme craft, something that delights whether it is deep or flitting, delights because of the perfection of its brush, its tone, its manner, because of its competency, because of its happy application of the art practised, because of the possibilities in it for pleasure in its sheer technical purity and perfection, regardless of everything in life outside it. Something in you withheld you from saying what a beautiful gesture that was, what a tone, what a contrivance in that scene, what reading in this, what technical facility. There was no device

to rejoice in, nothing technical to extricate and set aside as a studied piece of skill; there was no eloquence, no recitation, no obvious arrangement or technical economy or evident accomplishment. All these things are good in themselves, of course; they, too, may be almost in themselves a kind of art. They are means of speaking, dialects for ideas; and, after all, art is art, not life. They lead straight toward an exhibition of style. Style, however, in the sense of an added elaboration and distinction of method, of something in itself creative and separable, style in that separable aspect of facility, skill or tact, Duse rarely had. And it was only slowly and almost unwillingly that her art would allow you an academic enjoyment; it would not yield itself to the mere choice judgments of a sophistication in taste. Duse would not grant you that kind of appreciation. It was as if she would accept no love but the love for all herself and the cost that followed.

Only slowly did you see what labor and skill had gone to make up that creation of Duse's soul in the outer forms of an art. In *Così Sia* you saw her bending over the child, you saw her carry the pilgrim's staff, the lines of her

long garments, the pity of her hands, the wandering of her hands among the lights on the altar. You saw suddenly that dumbness and then that flutter of life through the body. You saw that the entire moment had revealed itself to you. You saw what this woman knew; and you wondered whether such a knowledge of the human life and soul resolved itself in her finally into tears or into light. But it was only gradually that you were aware of how Duse suggested perpetually a state of music which must have come from a long love and study of that art; and of how this quality was in evidence always, in her visual aspect, in the tone, and in her total conception of the part. And slowly you perceived Duse's years of familiarity with the lines of statuary, and the extent to which she had mastered from great sculpture the inevitable lines of grace and meaning, and had learned from it how to study the rhythms of the form she sought and to free these rhythms of all but that last beauty of its own characteristics.

People were numerous who objected to Duse's gestures, the rhythm of her hands, her perpetual use of draperies and arrangements of

pose. To make this objection is to confuse her art with what we ordinarily recognize and require as realism. To insist on her giving up these gestures and these flowing lines is to take away one of her mediums of expression. It would be to sacrifice for mere imitative probability the possibilities of another language. Duse could find an outer image that seemed to be wholly the inner thought that she expressed. This visual statement was not a copy of something which we may see in life and from which we may guess the inner thought; no, it exhibited—as great painting does or great sculpture—a visual design as free of or as faithful to actual nature as the artist chooses to make it. To appreciate Duse's rhythms of garments and bodily movements you needed to be able to do more than recognize mere fidelity to natural human life and its ways, you had to understand the visual medium itself, to be able to see and read it, precisely as you understand music by being able to hear it and not by recognizing its resemblance to familiar sounds, to birds, bells, or stormy weather. Duse could not be understood unless one knew that these gestures and these lines were in themselves a

great art; that they were added to her other mediums of expression as melody is added to the mere meaning of words.

Duse knew how to keep the mass and the line alive. She knew, like a great painter or sculptor, what degree of mere description, imitation, reproduction to put into an action, a posture, a gesture that is taken from nature; and at the same time she could give her line a life of its own, a meaning that was eventually independent of the thing she interpreted. She knew from the visual arts that no movement of gesture or line arises suddenly of itself, but that it must always exist as a part of a whole, must achieve its aptness and beauty not out of its limited, sudden self, but out of a mass of relationships; in sum, she knew what few actors know at all, that a line or gesture must begin and end. Duse knew subtly and inexplicably how to give to her very presence, to her body, as she was present on the stage, a radiance and a difference, like a creation in art. Her figure there remained in the mind as something at the same time both luminous and abstract.

And finally there was a quality in Duse's art

of which sometimes you were aware as you watched her playing, and sometimes unaware until days afterward, when the sense of it grew and filled your thoughts. This quality was the presence in what she did of mind. Not mind in the shape of a problem, an intellectual if rather obvious analysis or thesis, but a pervading thing far more profound.

You may take, for an example, the first act of Ibsen's *Ghosts*; what Duse did in it was a technical and spiritual marvel. The first act of *Ghosts* as Ibsen wrote it has an undercurrent of fine dramatic power and a sharp edge of truth. But in the course of the writing a provincialism and drabness of conception more than once appears; Mrs. Alving and her author are now and again insistent and parochial, and without either taste or imagination. Ibsen's Mrs. Alving falls into platitude, stubborn and firm. Duse turned such passages into what is not platitude, but passionate memory. What in Ibsen's lines is only half placed culturally—his reflections on life, his debates, analyses—Duse established easily in right relation to a wide culture and distinction. Meantime she set forth the idea that should dominate the play

as she saw it: the idea of maternal love and of a being whose body and whose love are interposed between her son and universal law.

Ibsen's drama of *The Lady from the Sea* has turns of psychology, biology, romance, symbolic poetry, and homely comedy, beginning stalely, running into a region with deep fascination to it, and winding up in a muddle of pseudo-scientific and moralistic explanations, manias, obsessions, freedom of choice, responsibility, and the like. It is outmoded now, but much of it was always without imagination or unifying power. What Duse did with *The Lady from the Sea* was like what she had done with many another play, with Galeratti-Scotti's *Così Sia*, for example, in which she took the simple story of a mother who had sacrificed all for her son only to be deserted by him, and gave to it her own marvellous conception of the nature of love. It was maternal love, to be sure, that Duse expressed; but this, after all, may be the greatest love theme, since it comprises all love; it is a love that begins with the desire to create out of its own body the body of a child, and then to go on forever creating its own mind and soul in the child's soul and

the child's mind. Such love underlies all life and expresses the process of all nature, which proceeds from physical substance to idea, and which within its mortal bodies creates its immortal forms and qualities.

When Ibsen's Ellida comes on the stage, with her restlessness, her hunger for the sea, her sense of the Stranger's power drawing her, we get some touch of mystery, no doubt, but also a strong suggestion of explanation; a diagnosis is suggested; the woman is neurotic, suffering from an obsession. When Duse's Ellida came on the scene what we got was a poetic idea, a thing free and complete in our minds, caught there like a light in the momentary shell of a human body. The woman was literally neurotic, yes, if you like, sick with a state of mind, exactly as we might say that she was a man's wife or breathed with her lungs. But that had little to do with the point, which consisted in the wonder of this thing felt, the singleness and purity of this mood, this dream of freedom, this affinity that affrights and allures. For this the woman there on the stage is the vessel. It is this that is permanent and beautiful and that drives forever toward the immortal; it is this

that is both poetic and—and here with Duse science found its right place—that is both poetic and biological. The truth Duse discovers thus, has that oneness of life at its heights and depths that art only at its best moments can achieve.

Ibsen's play came to its final idea. The Stranger reappears. Ellida is free to choose. What Duse creates then concerns love and freedom. A complete and limitless love, she tells us, is as vast as the sea and as infinite, and is itself the ultimate human freedom. The body of Wangel stands between Ellida and the body of the Stranger who has come to take her away; the love defeats the power that has haunted and destroyed her soul. And because this love is boundless and wide and inexhaustible, it, even more than the sea, allures and affrights her and feeds and consumes her life. This love, even more than the sea, can become her mystery.

With that conception and illumination that Duse brought to the theme of Ibsen's drama the whole is lifted into poetry. She did to it what would have happened at the hands of a great poet. She threw light upon it, dilated it, dis-

covered in it what is most significant and essential, and gave to that an existence of its own, a complete life. She discovered for it the right relation of the concrete to the ideal, of the phenomenon, the accident, to the permanent, the essential. And she created for this idea a form inseparable from it.

If Duse could dilate thus an Ibsen conception and give to it its due place in a larger cosmos of feeling and idea, her impress on the works of slighter dramatists would plainly go yet farther; it served either to remake or destroy them. To her a drama or a character exhibited only some power of life that lay in it; and so to hollow rôles, like many of Sardou's and of the ordinary theatre, she brought a devastating light; she acted out of herself some beauty and meaning that the dramatist had never imagined; and what he had not felt, of love, irony, radiance, she felt and created in the rôle.

You needed to see Duse in a shallow rôle like Sudermann's Magda or as Camille, or to watch her through a scene like that last of *The Lady from the Sea*, and then, when it was over, review and sum up what she had accomplished, if you

would realize her quality. You saw then more and more that such a gradation of emphasis throughout a play, and so fine and so elusive but unforgettable a comprehension of the entire meaning of the character and theme could come only from a remarkable ability and an association with culture and ideas, combined with a poetic and reflective nature, with a grace of spirit, with a courage of mind, and, finally, with something throughout the personality, quiet and taken for granted, I mean that kind of untouched and unstressed and constant spiritual audacity that moves great natures.

Duse not only illustrated the quality of the poetic as it applies not to poetry alone but to every other art. She illustrated the nature of realism in general, especially of that best Italian realism, which is so capable of rendering by means of only actual or possible external details the inmost idea. To speak of Duse's as stark realism, as was sometimes done, makes no sense. If you observed her well you saw that she never represented or reproduced or counterfeited anything. Actions the most literal were yet removed from the actual; everything that Duse did had a certain removal and

restatement to it. Every action she presented borrowed light from her.

When you know well the Greek marbles in the Naples Museum, you realize how subtly individual they are; types, yes, but within the security of the type intensely varied and singly felt. But in the north you meet with the sculpture of the younger Renaissance. You see not the type become real and individual, not, as in the classic, the poetry of the individual soul set forth with reticent intensity in universal forms. What you see is the individual reality, the very surface of the thing portrayed, set down with such spiritual and physical precision that its soul becomes its body and its body its soul. In the work of Desiderio da Settignano, Mino da Fiesole, Benedetto da Maiano and others you perceive a singular distinction in fidelity combined with ideal feeling. The portrait of the bishop at Fiesole, how much the man it is, but how removed from him and brought into our souls by the artist's taste and imperceptible style! The Guidarello Guidarelli at Ravenna, a little too direct, in the face at least too close to a mere likeness, but how full of intensity of life and animation, how full of death, too, how simply

tragic and yet how subtle and elaborate in its surface planes and its comment on the young spirit within! Mino da Fiesole adds to Holbein, for example, a singular sweetness, relaxation, and grace of culture. He has an ease and poetry of distinction where Holbein has distinction of artistic conscience and character. And Rosellino's tomb for the young cardinal at Samminiato, those fine and sensitive nostrils, those still, perfect hands quieted in death, the mouth droll and clear, almost alive and yet remote with death, the modelling under the chin sagging slightly down with its own weight and yet suggesting the idea of weight rather than the sagged flesh and mere accident of it, the closed eyes and the shadows under them, the still breast with the breath now taken somehow out of it—what exact and literal truth in all this, and yet what invisible style and what distinguished approach to the actual detail, what learning and culture and reflection! And underneath all this and putting the life into it, what an endowment of sheer animal talent and vitality! This, then, can be realism; though not the realism that we have heard so much about in France, where Zola and his school have reigned

and where Henri Becque and Flaubert have written their gray masterpieces; not the realism of Dutch painting, with its grotesque or brutal detail or its sound honesty, as the case might be; and not the gracious and ample realism of Velasquez. Like Dante's, though less poetic, less concrete, less intense, the realism of this sculpture is. And this was Duse's realism. It is a comment on the fact that Duse, though she was in long revolt against schools and classic formularies and almost against her craft itself, had yet no violence, no excess, and no accidents, because she kept her art close to her spirit and made sure that it expressed herself.

The poetic and realistic in Duse is further commented upon by her relation to D'Annunzio's art. D'Annunzio's gift is untranslatable into English; it is a gift for expression almost abnormal, a sensitivity to the color of experience carried beyond bounds, an abandonment to life, sensations and ideas that is in itself a kind of power. Together with these faculties D'Annunzio has a gift for style, for words. He achieves an orchestration of whatever single line he chooses to follow. It is easy to see why,

and not solely for personal reasons, as people like to think, Duse followed his art and in the face of obstacles forced on the public his plays, though she knew well their dramatic defects. Her art had none of D'Annunzio's recurrent falsity or specious images. It was more ordered than his, more in scale, more wisely and sweetly seen, more sorrowfully human, more universal in meaning and appeal. But D'Annunzio's plays brought to the service of drama the poetic mind, which she not only valued as a more luminous element than some basic social philosophy or superior technic in the theatre, but knew also to be far less often found there. D'Annunzio's plays gave her a constant, beautiful release of the life in her; they poured her spirit out on things, on people, on thought; they created her over and over and lighted her genius with another.

When she talked with you Duse used to come straight across the room and sit near, her fingers sometimes touching your arm. She spoke fluently and beautifully in varied images like those of poetry and with clearly made points. She spoke of herself, her art, of you, your ideas and work, but always with a kind

of deep egotism that seemed both personal and impersonal. It seemed an egotism without humor, but above the need for it, non-social but divinely human and true. It bore interestingly on her relation to artists; every one knows that the artists were numberless who drew from Duse inspiration, encouragement, fecundation of their talents; through them she became long before her death a great pathetic myth. Duse obliterated and exalted you. There was something about her central intensity that was like the creative impulse itself, like sexual love, and like creation in an artist. It was penetrating and oblivious at the same time. It ignored and held you. She reduced you to nothing and gave you at the same moment the sense of being taken as no mere individual but as something in yourself that was immortal. You felt ashamed to think of yourself or of the disconcerting oversight of your presence; and yet at the same moment you felt concerned only with what might be your eternal self. She gave you an unescapable, cruel life. You felt that after her there was no peace any more, not ever, but—in so far as you were alive at all—only the pressure and necessity and travail of creation,

la mia delizia ed erinni, as Leonardo said of art, the delight and torment. And yet you felt the kindest humanity and affection and interest, you brought your life of small affairs to her as to a gentle, wise mother.

It is interesting that Duse's face, wonderful as it was, was even more wonderful on the stage than when seen near to. Duse had a mask that was theatrical in the highest sense. The proportions of her face had a character that organized into something even finer under the visual conditions of the stage, under the *optique du théâtre*. The space between the eyes; the definite upper lids above the dark eyes; the length of the upper lip; the proportions of the cheekbones and the brow; the ample mouth and distinct teeth, with the modelling of the chin; were all such as the light, distance, and interrelationships of the theatrical scene could bring to great expressiveness and beauty. The same was true of her voice, which gained in beauty and expressiveness when brought to the pitch and rhythm of the stage. Duse's face, seen close, was not so tragic as it looked on the stage, because of the play of interest that you could see upon it. But the immense sadness of this

face came partly from the mere physical conformation, which in its sheer design was pathetic. There was also the record of pain and illness and of unfortunate or consuming events in her own experience. But over and above all these, and giving the final tragic heightening to Duse's face, was something that derived, I think, from the fact that her suffering arose most from the collision of her idealism with the mere ordinary conditions of life. From her living, her thought, and her emotion, she evolved her conceptions and ideas; and she saw these constantly defeated by the incompleteness and death in things.

Duse gave you first the impression of a certain strength, which came from the clear rhythms of her physical presence and from the ardor of her spirit when she talked. But she seemed frail too, partly from exhaustion and partly from a terrible sensitivity. Always after seeing her the thought came to you of what people from her audiences have so often mentioned, I mean the feeling she aroused of defense, the impulse to protect her. This impulse when you were face to face with her, hearing her talk, you seemed to feel less. She seemed

to possess strength for her own ends and a profound vitality. But afterward, the moment you left, there grew in your thoughts a marvellous poignancy, and with it this defense of her. This, I think, arose from your feeling of the intense presence in her of that element that we know is life, fragile, poignant, necessary.

Looking at her you thought of the question, so often debated, of Duse's neglect of the advantages of make-up on the stage; and it seemed probable that she avoided elaborate make-up not only in order, as we have heard so long, to let the living written on her face be read for its own truth, not only for this reason but also because she had found that, save for a little underscoring, her mask was both too fluid and too marked to do anything but lose under paint and paste.

Duse in her last season, now past sixty, when the poverty following the war and perhaps a desire to express her art for the younger theatre had sent her back to the stage, did not suggest age so much as she suggested a diminished endurance; it was a question more of quality than quantity. That is to say, you could see clearly that the actress might not be

able to go on for so long or so many performances, or for violent scenes, but it was also equally clear that for what she did her body lacked nothing and was adequate in the most exact meaning of the word. Duse kept her old physical co-ordination; the flow of lines was still perfect and continuous; there was no sense of stiffness or angularity, or, as nearly always happens with age, of that lessening in the power of the muscles to carry out the will. The voice was less clear and vibrant than once, but no less dramatic and penetrating. There was still to be heard that constant surprise and strange, quiet vitality in rhythm which she employed in her reading, and by which she gave, very often without using any other means, so terrible a sense of life. Looking at Duse's figure there on the stage you got pretty much what you always got, the sense of a body that had no existence apart from its idea. As had always been so, her art connected with her presence as music is connected with sound.

And in one respect above all Duse triumphed. She made no attempt to reproduce what as a younger artist she had once done. It was no revival of former creations, no cheating of time

and our memories that she gave. She did not strain after looking young, or paint and plaster herself into a pretty dolly, but played throughout in her own terms; she restated her dramatic material in terms of the Duse that she was at the present time, not only in appearance, but also—what is much more subtle and difficult—spiritually and mentally. In this achievement, and in the intention behind it, was illustrated, as much as in any fact about her, the nature of Duse's art and of her mind.

The same thing, I have thought, that made Duse's art illustrate the nature of all arts, made her in herself not only representative of our universal life, which is the soul, but also intensely representative in her own kind. She was, after all, profoundly Italian and profoundly feminine. She had about her something of the Italian country. That land brought by so much labor and devotion, and through so many years of work and living, to such beauty and civilization, seems after all most easy and natural and gently taken for granted. Its air and color and light, though they may be either meadows and green valleys thick with almond and olive trees, or volcanic fierce regions, harsh and touched

with death, have, every day when the right hours fall, a divine sweetness come over them, often something elegiac, something that is ancient, poignant, and grave. And those towns over Italy, after long centuries of art and living, present every one of them something that is its own, and that seems to simplify all that went to make it up into at last a vivid and un-insistent whole, with its own character and truth. And everywhere in Italy the famous *combinazione* is to be seen, the faculty of taking whatever one wills out of any style or age or origin, and putting it where one pleases and adding to it whatever one likes to have added. Freedom and naturalness of choice and absence of the academic are almost the first quality in the aspect of Italian towns. And this labor, apparent ease, unity, freedom were the first quality in the aspect of Duse's art, which drew from many regions but lived always in one, and which used its culture for ends so immediate and necessary that it could not be pedantic or highly schooled.

The sweetness and harmony and poignant precision that Duse had were Italian, and a certain tragic literalness and warmth of mind.

She had the Italian consuming life, with its simplicity and directness of approach combined with what is subtle and highly complex. In the deepest sense Duse seemed the most feminine of all artists. It was not so much in the traits usually spoken of, now satirically, now sentimentally, as characteristic of women, it was rather something in a last fundamental quality by which women may differ from men. There was supremely in her that virginal or pure quality that women have when they love or give themselves as instruments by which, through the birth of a child, life is created anew. There was in Duse this quintessence of the woman, a divine generosity, a purity of response, a beautiful singleness of mood, an absorption with living values without other considerations, an existence universal and personal rather than social, a body and soul that are solitary and infinite with the principle of generation, a fatalism and pity that come from a nearness to birth and death.

You constantly heard and read of Duse's sadness, of the tragic element that was said to be always present in her, and that was admired or resented by the spectators as the case might

be. But whether you were either depressed or left impatient, or bound forever by this, it is more profitable to think of such a quality in Duse and her art as deriving not so much from sadness as from a certain impression of finality. In her art the thing presented, the action, the thought, took on the pathos of finality, something of the far, perfect line, the hail and farewell; there was in it for us somehow a nostalgia, a tragic sense of beauty and completion.

To people for whom Duse's art was a power and a new impulse of life, her supreme quality was what lay behind no art in particular, but behind all art, the response to life. The poet, the musician, the painter and architect, and actor or dancer, and the saint, also, whose life and ways possess the continuity and creative passion of art, all draw life to them by their capacity for it. In them life is gathered, it refracts, simplifies, finds out its essential and eternal principle or idea and a new body for it, and so goes on. And in Duse of all artists people most felt the thing they most respond to in all living, an infinity of tragic wonder and tenderness.

1. From a study of Garrick's biography, what would you say of the range of his talent compared to Duse's?

2. Mention twelve rôles in which Duse was successful.

3. What interpretation would a mind and talent like Duse's have given to a rôle like Ophelia? To Lady Macbeth? To Mrs. Alving? To Goldoni's *La Locandiera*?

4. Duse did not willingly essay classic rôles like Medea or like Racine's Andromache. Why was her talent better fitted to modern rôles like the women of D'Annunzio, Praga, Sudermann, Gallarati-Scotti, than to rôles from the Greek, from Shakespeare, or from Alfieri?

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INDEX

- Abel, Walter, 90
Acting, American, English, Russian, French, Italian, 54
Acting, an art or no art? 1

Barrymore, Ethel, 77
Barrymore, Lionel, 76
Bernhardt, Sarah, 51, 81, 175, 176, 178

Calhern, Louis, 90
Chaliapin, Feodor, 6, 11, 40, 82
Chaplin, Charles, 11, 40, 82
Cohan, George M., 24
Copeland, George, 39
Costumes, 95
Craig, Gordon, 34, 130, 131

D'Annunzio, Gabriele, 170, 193, 194
Deluge, The, Hopkins production, 137
Diderot, 16
Duse, Eleonora, 11, 34, 175

Eames, Clare, 76, 137
El Greco, 130
Euripides, 119, 122
Exhibitionism in acting, 62

Forbes-Robertson, Sir Johnston, 27

Gahagan, Helen, 88
Galsworthy, John, 158
Garden, Mary, 49
Garrick, David, 16, 79
Grasso, Giovanni, 8, 11, 19, 178
Guilbert, Yvette, 20

Hamlet, the Hopkins production, 120

Illusion in acting, 6, 53
Inevitability, 48

- Johnson, Edward, 45
Jones, Robert Edmond, 120
Keane, Doris, 158, 163
Lear, King, 152
Lenihan, Winifred, 89
Lenormand, *Les Ratés*, 152
Macbeth, 143, 144
Manship, Paul, 116
Mimicry, 86
Mounet-Sully, 68, 115, 178
Movement in acting, 39
Music, 102, 133, 137, 160, 183
Nazimova, Alla, 49
Obviousness, 48
Pirandello, 133, 142
Plato, 1, 108, 125
Racine, 17
Réjane, 9
Shaw, George Bernard, 43, 168
Sheridan, R. B., 17, 100
Sophocles, 101, 119
Speed, 42
Tempo, 44
Type acting, 18
Velasquez, 96, 120, 150, 180, 193
Warfield, David, 75
Way of the World, The, 104
Winwood, Estelle, 21
Wonder in Acting, 69
Wright, Haidee, 79
Young, Roland, 76

